

ASSESSING PARENTS PERCEPTIONS AND PARTICIPATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS: A CASE STUDY OF BEKEZELA CRECHE



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COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

I, Sibahle Mkhize..... declare that

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2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the accessibility of early childhood development programs and parents' participation in these programs. The case study undertaken was Bekezela Crèche situated in Maphumulo with a focus on its early childhood development program. This study used a qualitative research design which consisted of in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions. The in-depth interviews consisted of three key informants as well as parents who were separated into two groups, each group had 10 parents. The first group of parents had enrolled their children at Bekezela Crèche while the second group of parents did not have access to early childhood development programs for their children. The focus group discussions consisted of teachers at Bekezela Crèche and its governing body. The findings showed that children from poor backgrounds and with unemployed parents who could not afford to pay crèche fees had less access early childhood development programs. In contrast parents who were employed found the crèche fees affordable. Essentially, the study established that poor parents' participation in early childhood development programs was limited by working patterns and in some cases illiteracy among older care givers.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents Pelda Mkhize and Bonginkosi Mkhize who have encouraged me through the research journey. The support you have shown towards me is remarkable. I am grateful for having you as my parents' thank you. To my sisters Nontokozo Mkhize and Zasembo Majola thank you for the words of wisdom that gave me strength to continue with my research. I thank Jesus Christ for my family who have shown me unconditional love.

My dissertation aimed to explore the challenges children from poor households experience when trying to access ECD programs. I am passionate about the development of children. I strive towards making a difference in the lives of poor children particularly in the early years of their development. I would like to change the realities of children in South Africa by pursuing further research in curriculum development of ECD programs designed for children with disabilities with the aim of improving service delivery.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

ECD: Early Childhood Development

HIV: Human Immune-deficiency Virus

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NIP: National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development in South Africa

NPO: Non-profit Organisation

SACMEQ: Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

USA: United States of America

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD)

Provision of good and quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs in developing countries is crucial for children growing up in poverty stricken families with limited access to education and learning resources. If parents and other stakeholders remain uninformed and uninvolved in ECD programs this can lead to poor support and implementation of the programs (Rule and Bhana, 2013). There is also a need to develop culturally and contextually relevant ECD programs in which stakeholders, particularly parents' perspectives are clearly understood and integrated into the development of ECD programs.

The South African Department of Education notes that, "previous governments have taken the view that early childhood development is the responsibility of parents and families and not of the state" (Department of Education, 2007:7). Parents however play a primary and pertinent role in raising their children. That is to say, the role of a parent is crucial in the development of a child. As a consequence, gaining parents' perceptions on ECD programs is integral in generating improved approaches which will positively impact ECD programs (Department of Social Development and UNICEF, 2007). Government interventions on ECD programs are however still founded on the principle that parents and families are solely responsible for the provision of primary care and upbringing of the child. The Department of Education states that, "for an ECD program to be effective it must be based on the involvement of parents, communities and other stakeholders in democratic government structures" (Department of Education, 2007:13).

Again, it is stated that the provision of ECD programs to preschool-aged children has a positive effect on cognitive stimulation, nutrition and care. When children have access to ECD programs the long-term positive impacts are increased primary school enrolment, enhanced school performance as well as lower grade repetition and drop-out rates (Draper et al, 2011). This also has positive spill-over effects as the Department of Education will spend less on remedial education costs and also incur possible improvement in economic productivity because children who have accessed an ECD program are more likely to be employed (Atmore et al, 2012).

One of the predominant issues in South Africa is poverty. It is estimated that more than half of South Africa's children live in poverty. It has been further established that income poverty is closely connected to poor health, limited access to education, nutrition, healthcare services and a safe environment (Atmore et al, 2012). The main challenge thus is the gap of children from poverty stricken backgrounds who lack access to an ECD program (EWEC Technical Paper, 2015). Other challenges associated with children raised in poor households include a risk of infant death, low birth weight, stunted growth and poor adjustment to school (Department of Education White Paper, 2001:12).

1.1.2 EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

The convention on the rights of the child was signed by the South African government which includes the provision of free medical and health care services for pregnant women and children from birth till the age of 6 (National Plan of Action for Children, 2012). Government's intervention also led to the introduction of a reception year program known as grade R for children who are 5 years old. The Provincial Social Development Departments have also made ECD subsidies available for ECD sites in poor communities. An estimated 12 million children had access to the child support grant in year 2012 (Atmore et al, 2012:5). There are 23, 482 ECD sites across South Africa, 40% of ECD services are in rural areas and 60% in urban areas (Biersteker, 2011:2). In the year 2011 734, 654 children were enrolled in grade R class. The number of children enrolled in grade R class grew to 836, 000 in 2012; and 19, 500 ECD centres were registered nation-wide (Atmore et al, 2012: 11). These registered centres received ECD subsidies from the Department of Social Development.

However there is still a long way to go because access to ECD programs in South Africa is lower in three provinces with the highest number of poor children (Berry et al, 2013). These provinces are Limpopo, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal whose rural areas are remote, impoverished and communication and transport networks are severely limited. Children who live in most of these rural areas have poor access to quality ECD programs. Additionally, most children living in rural areas also suffer from under-resourced ECD centres that have poor teacher to child ratios. The preceding situation is compounded by the remoteness of these rural areas from financial funding resources and poor infrastructure (Biersteker, 2012). According to Biersteker (2011), ECD sites with a high percentage of enrolled African learners, have the greatest number of poor quality ratings on service delivery. It is also

recorded that the qualifications nation-wide of 54,503 ECD practitioners as of 2012 are as follows 12% are qualified, 88% require additional training (Atmore, 2012: 10).

1.1.3 EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The main ECD policy in South Africa was the establishment of a national system of provision for the reception year called grade R for children aged 5 years. The target goal was to have 85% of all 5 year olds in grade R in public schools and 15% in community based ECD sites by the year 2010 (Department of Education White Paper, 2001). Government's target was to have 945,000 children enrolled for grade R (National Integrated Plan, 2005). The enrolment in year 2010 was 86,980 this shows that the target goal was not reached (National Integrated Plan, 2005). However the president did extend this goal to year 2014 but it seems that more time is needed to reach the goal of having a place in grade R for every child before grade 1. The provincial Department of Education is responsible for financial provision for grade R. Short term subsidies were also allocated to public schools to establish grade R facilities. The motivation for subsidising 75% of grade R was due to the financial burden of ECD programs falling disproportionately on the poor (Spaull, 2012).

The Department of Education aims to increase early learning opportunities to all learners particularly those in poor households (Atmore, 2012). This is so because government seeks to assist in breaking the cycle of poverty by increasing access to ECD programs. The purpose is to further protect and aid the child to develop his or her full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential (Department of Education, 2007). Inherently, there is the understanding that a child's early learning experience is affected by the early care they receive from parents, pre-school teachers and caregivers. This thus implies that it is during early childhood that a child develops all the key elements of intelligence such as confidence, curiosity, capacity to communicate and cooperativeness (Berry et al, 2013). Children 4 years old and younger have been included in a strategic plan that calls for inter-sectorial collaboration. The strategic plan focuses on curriculum development to ensure that early learning is taking place in ECD centres, as this prepares children for formal schooling. The inter-sectorial plan also prioritised the subsidization of ECD programs for 4 year olds from poor rural and urban areas (Department of Education White Paper, 2001).

1.2 GAPS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The current early childhood development policy suffers from a fragmented policy framework for ECD, this results in uncoordinated service delivery (Biersteker and Motala, 2011). The challenge is that all ECD services do not fit into a particular government department. ECD services cover health, nutrition, safe environments, psychosocial and cognitive development of children (Pelletier and Neuman, 2013). There is also a limited access to ECD services particularly in rural areas as these services are concentrated in urban areas (Pitt et al, 2013). In effect, there are visible inequalities in the existing ECD provision as access to ECD programs varies between urban and rural areas. ECD programs are more accessible in urban areas and are of better quality in comparison to rural areas (Pitt et al, 2013). Further still, there are insufficient financial resources and human resources to ensure good quality ECD programs in rural areas. The monitoring mechanisms are limited as there is limited inter-department collaboration which would ensure adequate, efficient and quality ECD provisioning for children (National Integrated Plan, 2005).

1.3 NATIONAL INTEGRATED PLAN FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

It has been stated that the National Integrated Plan (NIP) for ECD aims to create synergy and co-ordination of current government programs undertaken by various departments in the field of ECD. The NIP's goal is to provide children in South Africa with a good and quality start through building a solid foundation of physical, emotional, psychosocial, and cognitive development (National Integrated Plan, 2005). The first priority is to deliver services that cover the basic developmental needs of children. The second priority aims to provide training to caregivers and parents so as to improve knowledge and skills in interacting with young children (Biersteker, 2012).

To reiterate, the role parents and caregivers play is important because through the training they receive they can be facilitators of ECD. This is particularly important where large numbers of children do not have access to formal ECD programs (National Integrated Plan, 2005). Pelletier and Neuman (2013) affirm that the best way to give children a good start in life is through an integrated approach to ECD. This view runs counter to the practice of focussing on a single aspect of childhood development as this does not yield sustainable results. The integrated approach includes programs in health, nutrition, water, sanitation,

early learning and psychosocial care (Draper et al, 2011). Co-ordination between and within the different tiers of government and community organisations is a key factor in successfully providing ECD services.

Furthermore, the NIP aims to create an environment in which children, particularly vulnerable children can learn, grow and thrive (National Integrated Plan, 2005). Increasing opportunities for young children to enter formal schooling well prepared can be achieved by providing support to caregivers and parents. This support will enable parents and caregivers to educate and provide good care to their children. This will reduce the negative developmental effects of poverty on children from birth to 4 years of age (National Plan of Action for Children, 2012). The NIP target was to reach an estimated 2.5 to 3 million poor and vulnerable children (Biersteker, 2011). The NIP initially started with identifying 1 million children receiving services from the Department of Social Development and the Department of Education. The NIP aimed to reach universal coverage of approximately 5 million children in the year 2010 (Atmore, 2012). However in the year 2010 the NIP did not reach this target. The primary components of the plan consisted of an integrated management of childhood illnesses, immunisation, nutrition, health services, social security grants, early learning stimulation, development and implementation of psychosocial programs (Biersteker and Motala, 2011).

1.3.1 CHALLENGES IN NATIONAL INTEGRATED PLAN IN ECD SERVICE PROVISIONING

It has been established that early childhood development focuses on achieving a smooth transition to primary school through the introduction of a reception year program (Pelletier and Neuman, 2013). However, a major challenge regarding the variable service quality still persists. The NIP recognised that the reception year program alone was not able to provide adequate child development to vulnerable children who were living in poverty in rural areas (National Integrated Plan, 2005). The NIP was built on existing programs which consisted of free health care for children under the age of 6 and pregnant women. Social assistance was provided in the form of the child support grant and poverty targeted per-child subsidies in non-profit community-based ECD centres for children under school age. “The NIP was developed through a phased approach, with an initial focus on increasing centre access and quality. This started with registered ECD centres and continued with the intention to extend

to non-registered centres” (Biersteker, 2011: 2). ECD programs for children younger than 5 years are only provided by ECD centres that are privately or community- based owned (EWEC Technical Paper, 2015).

There was an increasing backlog in practitioner training for ECD. Poor infrastructure also makes it extremely difficult for some ECD centres to meet minimum requirements in order to qualify for ECD subsidies (Berry et al, 2013). Another challenge was human resource constraints in provincial and district offices which further increases difficulties in ECD centre registration processes. “The lack of reliable data on numbers of children enrolled, the state of infrastructure, and levels of staff qualification, is a further problem” (Biersteker, 2011:4). Although subsidy funding was well targeted the subsidy does not cover all the costs of ECD centres. This has caused centres to charge fees for ECD programs which eventually lead to the exclusion of the poorest children (Pitt et al, 2013). ECD centre provision was likewise skewed to older children as children under age 3 are mostly cared for at home (Biersteker, 2011).

There has been minimal support for community and home-based services that consisted of home visiting programs, community playgroups and parent education programs (Draper et al, 2011). The main concern was that there were no clear provisioning and funding norms for community and home-based programs. Local government was the relevant platform to provide an integrated ECD service provision but there was minimal coordination in most municipalities. This was caused by a lack of legislative clarity on the roles and responsibilities of local authorities regarding early childhood services other than environmental health and safety (National Plan of Action for Children, 2012).

1.4 STUDY MOTIVATION

This study is motivated by the need to understand why there is a gap in the accessibility of ECD programs by poor children. There is a need to understand the contradiction that exists; ECD programs are supported by government to particularly help poor children to be ready for formal schooling yet it is the poor children who struggle the most to access these programs. Accessibility of ECD programs by poor children is important to ensure that children are provided with a nourishing and stimulating environment to encourage optimal development. This study aims to contribute to understandings of ECD in South Africa by examining

parents' perceptions. What do parents understand about ECD programs and how can they participate in these programs. This study intends to understand the processes that affect child development and the role parents play in these processes. This is integral as parents are primarily responsible for the care and development of their children.

1.5 STUDY OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this study is to assess parents' perceptions and participation in early childhood development programs in KwaZulu-Natal.

The objectives of this study are:

- To assess the availability and accessibility of ECD programs.
- To assess parents' understanding of early childhood development programs.
- To evaluate parents' roles and participation in ECD programs.
- To consider the benefits of ECD programs to children and parents.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions the study intends to answer are:

- What do parents expect from early childhood development programs?
- What role do parents play in these programs?
- How accessible are early childhood development programs to poor children?
- What are the benefits of these programs?

1.7 RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted using a qualitative method because it enabled the researcher to understand how parents viewed ECD programs and how they participated in them. The data collection method included face to face in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions. Vignettes were used as a way of broadening focus from personal experiences to more abstract issues. Data collected was analysed using thematic analysis.

1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The theoretical framework used for this study was the ecological systems theory of human development. The ecological model understands the development of a child as embedded in a series of interacting systems. It is argued that, “an ecological systems approach emphasises the need to consider the child in the context of and in interaction with her family and community environment” (Pitt et al, 2013:3). The child in the microsystem interacted mainly with parents and teachers. The parent was the primary care giver: the immediate system of the child. The role played by parents was crucial in healthy development of the child and progress at school.

The development and learning of children was affected by the interactions that occur between the school and home setting (Chikutuma, 2013). These interactions were contained within the mesosystem hence in the context of a focus on ECD there is a need for wider parental and stakeholder involvement in ECD programs. The interactions the parents have with teachers as they participate in ECD programs have positive outcomes. This occurs because parents gain knowledge about school activities which enables them to help their children with activities such as homework. In concurrence is the affirmation by Mawere et al (2015) view that the knowledge parents’ gain from the teachers enable them to establish a stimulating learning environment at home to complement what children are taught at the ECD centre. The participation of parents in ECD programs as a result becomes beneficial to the teachers of ECD centres.

Aside from the micro and meso systems; there are exosystems that refer to powerful influences beyond the micro and meso levels which indirectly affected the child. Employment practices of parents generate resources that could be directed towards the child’s wellbeing. For example, an employed parent may be able to pay the monthly crèche fees; as a result of this, they are likely to enrol their child in an ECD program (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This indicates that these resources have an impact on the child’s arrangements of day to day care. That is to say, the decision a parent makes regarding the day to day care arrangement of the child is often influenced by employment. Some parents are at work during the day and may not have someone in the family to care for the child so they choose ECD centres as alternate care arrangement for their children (Shumba et al, 2014).

Beyond this the macrosystem explained the dominant cultural beliefs and values around young children which includes child rearing practices (Swick and Williams, 2006). The cultural context consists of belief systems and material resources; parents' participation in ECD activities could be influenced by a parent's belief system and available material resources at their disposal. The ecological model was useful for this study as it allowed an examination of processes and impacts of ECD.

ORGANISATION OF THE DISSERTATION

CHAPTER ONE Introduces the topic, concepts and aims of the study. It also provides a brief introduction to the research methodology and theoretical framework.

CHAPTER TWO Consists of the literature review which highlights themes for discussion. This chapter also includes a detailed theoretical framework.

CHAPTER THREE Outlines the research methodology including data collection and data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR Is a presentation of study results.

CHAPTER FIVE Is the discussion chapter which will also conclude the dissertation.

EXPLANATION OF CONCEPTS USED

This study used a number of concepts that are explained below:

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Early childhood development is a comprehensive approach to policies and programs for children from birth to nine years of age with active participation of their parents and caregivers (National Integrated Plan, 2005). Early childhood development encompasses a process where children grow and thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially (Atmore, 2012).

CHILD SUPPORT GRANT

The child support grant is money paid to the primary caregiver who ought to be 16 years or older, they must be a South African citizen or permanent resident. The child support grant is given to the caregiver to provide for the child's basic needs (Department of Social Development, 2008).

POVERTY

Poverty refers to a state where an individual is unable to provide for him/herself because they lack resources to satisfy basic needs. Atmore et al (2012) explain poverty as a means where one lacks income, has limited access to housing, health services and education.

VULNERABILITY

This is the state of being defenceless to life's threats, thus negatively affecting one's well-being. Devereux (2002) and Ellis (2003) state that people become vulnerable when they are at the "tipping point", when a shock that they would otherwise recover from with relative ease causes a catastrophic and hard to reverse reduction in their well-being or access to resources.

ECD CENTRE

ECD centre is a place that provides day care and preschool program for young children (Department of Social Development, 2015).

PARENT

“A parent is anyone responsible for the care and protection of a young child, who is stable in the child’s life and who loves the child and wants to protect the child. A parent may be a biological, foster or adoptive parent or another primary caregiver such as a grandparent” (Richter et al, 2014:50).

INFORMAL ECD PROGRAMS

Informal ECD programs can be provided through home-visits and play groups. “Home-visiting is the delivery of services at the household level to primary caregivers and young children for the purpose of providing information, supporting early learning and development, and promoting referrals and linkages to support services” (Department of Social Development, 2015: 15). A play group has young children organised for play activities to learn social interaction, sensorimotor development, language development, creativity, critical thinking and exploration (Department of Social Development, 2015). A play group is attended by parents and supervised by a facilitator.

FOOD INSECURITY

Food insecurity refers to having uncertain or limited availability of nutritionally adequate food. This also includes the inability to acquire food in socially acceptable means (Weiser et al, 2011).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The National Department of Education of South Africa defines early childhood development (ECD) as a process where children from birth to nine years grow and develop physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially (Department of Education, 2001). There is the widely established and accepted view that early childhood development programs are crucial for young children living in poverty as they provide the necessary early stimulation and learning that young children need in order to develop their full cognitive capacity. These programs are also said to offer an opportunity to provide better preparation for formal schooling to children who are at risk of lagging behind in school. Importantly, ECD programs provide positive impacts to children who are vulnerable to poverty. Effectually, government provision of ECD programs occurs because of the benefits obtained from these programs and their impact on preventing grade retention (Atmore, 2012). This review of literature begins with an examination of young children in the South African context. Additionally, the review will engage in a discussion of the accessibility and availability of ECD programs as well as parents' participation and perceptions of ECD programs. Two ECD case studies will be examined to highlight the main themes: one from Eastern Cape and another from Cape Town informal settlements. A two-pronged approach that explores the role of parents and an evaluation of ECD programs will be used to consider the possible benefits these programs provide.

2.2 SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT: SITUATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

In South Africa, it is submitted that poverty makes families more vulnerable because of their low levels of education, economic and environmental deprivation (Atmore, 2012). Poverty distress can also result in harsh and poor parenting. Children living in poverty are more likely to experience negative impacts on their early learning because they lack enrichment, suffer stress and trauma in their home environment and have low levels of access to government services (National Planning Commission, 2011). A study conducted in the United States of America (USA) shows that when children from poor backgrounds started school, a measurement of their performance demonstrated that they lag six months behind their peers

from more affluent backgrounds (Berry et al, 2013). This essentially indicates that a lack of early learning negatively affects the cognitive development of children from poor backgrounds especially when they start school. In concurrence is the finding of Kuhne et al, (2013) which shows that based on children's poor performance in literacy and numeracy in the foundation phase in South Africa, children from poor families are more likely to repeat grades and develop special educational needs in later school years. Therefore, access to quality ECD programs by poor children is an integral intervention which could aid in reducing the school readiness gap.

The estimated number of children below the age of five in South Africa stood at 5.2 Million (as of 2011); with black children making up 86% of that population group (Biersteker and Motala, 2011). It is also submitted that South Africa also has a high rate of child poverty because poor households have large numbers of children (Biersteker and Motala, 2011). A significant population of these households live in rural areas which are often associated with high levels of poverty. An estimated 66% of young children grow up in poverty-stricken environments, creating a risk to their overall developmental potential (Atmore, 2012). Other effects of growing up in a poor household include stunting and under nutrition, which compromises neurological development (National Planning Commission, 2011). A compromised neurological development is said to negatively affect the ability of the child to benefit from learning. Another issue is that poor children do not have adequate exposure to experiences and materials to stimulate their development (Anderson, 2008). This inherently means they are not sufficiently equipped to meet the demands of formal schooling (Atmore, 2012).

Annual National Assessments show a widening achievement gap as children grow older; and this remains a big challenge in South Africa's educational system (Spaull, 2013). Britto et al (2011) are of the view that the foundation of literacy and numeracy is embedded in early language development communication that promotes listening, attentiveness, understanding and speaking abilities. The concern is that most children start school without the building blocks mentioned above. In 2013, 31% of grade 3 children scored less than 40% on home language assessments, compared to the 43% of grade 9 children (Biersteker and Harrison, 2014). The widening of the gap is prominent for mathematics, where 26% of grade 3 children scored less than 40% compared to 55% of grade 6 and 94% of grade 9 children (Biersteker

and Harrison, 2014). As the study will maintain that a child's brain needs a stimulating environment conducive to learning from birth onwards.

2.2.1 SOUTH AFRICAN DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

In South Africa, it is recorded that children in the poorest 20% of households are twice less likely to have access to adequate sanitation, water and twice less likely to be exposed to ECD programs (National Development Plan, 2011). They are also 3 times less likely to complete secondary education, 17 times more likely to experience hunger, 25 times less likely to have a medical scheme (Walker et al, 2011). The National Plan of Action for Children (2012:18) makes the submission that “the existence of large disparities in children's access to some of the essentials of life, points to a critical policy challenge that requires a more accelerated drive to redress inequalities from the past as well as confronting the substantial barriers that the poorest children still face today”.

Extrapolating from the above, it comes to the fore that South Africa is lagging behind in meeting the required health targets of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals. For instance, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), number 3 emphasises improved health outcomes that includes ensuring healthy lives and promotes well-being for all at all ages (Norheim et al, 2015:239). In spite of lagging behind in some of the SDGs targets, South Africa has however recorded a reduction in child mortality, 20000 babies are stillborn and 23000 die before they reach one month of age (Biersteker, 2012). In total 75000 children die before their fifth birthday (National Plan of Action for Children, 2012). Optimal nutrition is important during infancy and childhood. This is because adequate feeding has impacts on child health and development. Because of chronic nutritional deprivation, one in five children is stunted and one in ten children is under weight (Walker et al, 2011). Chronic undernutrition in early childhood also results in diminished cognitive and physical development that places children at a disadvantage for the rest of their lives.

There are further gaps in ensuring that ECD practitioners offering the ECD curriculum are adequately equipped (Department of Social Development, 2015). Funding models as well as technical support required to expand the ECD sector to rural areas remains a challenge. Income poverty remains a segment of inequality in South Africa because it is a key determinant of children's standard of living (Spaull, 2012). The National Plan of Action for

Children in South Africa estimated that 11.9 million children live in poverty (National Plan of Action for Children, 2012). Unemployment is also a barrier to overcoming child poverty, 4 out of 10 children live in households with no employed household members (National Development Plan, 2011). Among the poorest, 7 out of 10 children live in households with no economic active members (National Planning Commission, 2011). Children in the poorest households are thus more likely to experience hunger (Pelletier and Neuman, 2013).

2.3 AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF ECD PROGRAMS

Early learning is a crucial process that involves interactions between the child's brain and experiences (Ilifa Labantwana Organisation, 2013). Early stimulation adequately matches to the child's developmental level. In the past, early learning was only associated with cognitive development. However, self-regulation, perseverance, motivation and socio-emotional development are important factors that underpin children's ability to learn (Digirolamo et al, 2014). There is a need for early learning to start at home before progressing to play groups and formal programs for older children. Only 20% of South Africa's poorest children below the age of 5 access a formal early learning program (Berry et al, 2013). The National Integrated Plan promotes universal access of early education for 4 to 5-year-olds and recognises the need to improve education for 0-3 year olds but there has been no agreement on the provision of these services (National Integrated Plan, 2005).

Early learning programs for children 5 years and younger are mainly provided by non-profit organisations (NPO) and the private sector. The intervention government has in place is a provision of a subsidy to NPOs for poor children attending ECD centres (Britto et al, 2011). The subsidy from government however does not provide coverage for the entire operating costs of ECD centres and centre managers require user fees to make up the cost difference. In 2012, 485,500 children under five years received an ECD centre subsidy (Britto et al, 2011). An estimated 16% of poor children aged 0-5 years were also covered by this subsidy in 2013/2014 (Martin et al, 2014). In the year 2011, 14% of poor children received an ECD centre subsidy. ECD centre provision skews more to older children, with most infants and children below three years being cared for at home (Biersteker, 2011:40).

Children younger than 3 years are most likely not to be enrolled in ECD centres (Biersteker, 2011:40). A case in point is the reality that poor children who live in rural areas where there

are few or no ECD centres do not benefit from the ECD programs (Biersteker, 2012). Young children are also unable to attend ECD programs at centres if their caregivers are unable to afford to pay the required user fees. Accordingly, Rule and Bhana (2013) argue that the challenge of ECD centre accessibility is one of inequitable availability with the poorest children having the least access. Another additional burden is the insufficient quality of the ECD programs provided to impoverished communities. It is firmly posited that learning begins at birth; in the South African context however, increasing poverty levels result in poor quality home environments where children receive limited stimulation (Atmore et al, 2012). The lack of enriching home environments and poor access to ECD programs causes inadequate preparation for formal schooling to poorer children. This is apparent in the current poor performance of foundation phase learners in the public education system (Spaull, 2013). Effectually, access to early learning through ECD programs is crucial to reduce school readiness gap for children from impoverished backgrounds.

The compartments in a child's brain responsible for early learning development progress rapidly from pregnancy to the first 24 months of life (Britto et al, 2011). Berry et al (2013) view thus gives an indication that at birth, children are ready to learn from their interactions with the environment. As children respond to the stimulation they receive, neural networks associated with language, memory and higher cognitive functions evolve rapidly. With regards to how best to achieve early learning outcomes, Saide (2010) suggests that an integrated approach is required in order to address children's holistic development consisting of the following: physical-motor, social-emotional, communication-language and cognitive abilities. Parents, caregivers and teachers at ECD centres become influential actors who contribute to what children learn and how they learn.

Another submission shows that poor and vulnerable children are at risk of not achieving these early learning needs. The achievement gap widens because of differences in quality of environments young children interact with during their rapid development stage (Biersteker, 2012). In 2007, the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) conducted a test that assessed grade 6 learner performance. The results showed variation in learner performance. The performance of learners from affluent backgrounds was 52% for reading and 44% for mathematics. While learners from poorer backgrounds performance was 27% for reading and 17% for mathematics (Spaull, 2012: 12).

2.3.1 SERVICE PROVISION CHALLENGE

The free services available for young children are healthcare, a child support grant and means-tested per child per day subsidies in non-profit community based ECD centres for children under school going age (Department of Social Development, 2015). The Department of Education has introduced a reception year program into public schools known as grade R (Department of Education, 2001). However, this reception year program is available to children who are 5 years old and above excluding children who are under 5 years old. Children who are under the age of 5 are therefore cared for at home or in ECD community centres which are considered private and not part of government's public service delivery (Burger, 2010). The comprehensive package of ECD services consist of the following: birth registration, maternal and child health services, nutrition, referrals for social security, social services, early learning stimulation and psychosocial programs (Biersteker, 2012). ECD services for children in South Africa from birth until 4 years are predominantly privately owned or provided by NGOs and NPOs. They are of variable quality and not part of the government system of provision. The ECD program delivery system is therefore fragmented and small scale; this hinders expansion of programs and services to increase coverage of the most vulnerable children (Atmore et al, 2012).

There was a recorded increase in ECD centre programs access in 2001. The number of 0-4 year olds accessing ECD centre programs grew from 16% in year 2001 to 30% in 2009. An estimated 25% of children aged 2 years attend an ECD centre compared to 60% of four year olds as of 2011 (Biersteker and Motala, 2011). Although children may attend an ECD centre program this does not mean there is an early learning program in place. National Departments have investigated and found that only half of all ECD centres offer an educational program, which meets the basic quality standards (Department of Social Development, 2015). One of the barriers poor children encounter in accessing ECD programs is the inability to afford centre fees (Draper et al, 2011). This makes ECD program access for poorest children substantially low. The following example demonstrates that 22% of children in the poorest quintile under 5 years old attend an ECD centre in comparison to 51% of children in the same age category who are in the richer quintiles (Biersteker and Motala, 2011). A possible reason for the gap is the high unemployment levels particularly among poor women. Currently only 470,000 children receive the ECD centre subsidisation from the Department of Social Development (Biersteker and Motala, 2011).

It is of import to highlight that these subsidies make a difference to the centres but they are not enough to meet centre costs. A concern arises regarding these state subsidies for poor children attending ECD centres because the impact of these subsidies is not directly associated with improved educational activities (Department of Social Development, 2015). Biersteker and Motala (2011:6) state that, “the fact that child care provision is not public, though the public sector is responsible for compliance with regulations, raises a dilemma about supporting infrastructure and other capital improvements”. While the government provides a supervisory role with regards to the execution of these subsidies, it however encounters other additional challenges like: insufficient staff for monitoring and supportive functions (Draper et al, 2011). Increasing access to ECD programs among the poorest quintile of children is therefore dependent upon available government funding.

Additionally, the NIP highlights the responsibility of the state to develop an effective integrated system to make sure that ECD services are accessible to all children, especially children whose development is most at risk (National Integration Plan, 2005). Still, there is a significant gap between the policy vision and realities of limited access. In the Children’s Act, it is submitted that the role of the state is to develop an adequately resourced, coordinated and managed early childhood development system (Children’s Amendment Act No.41 section 92(1), 2007). The two main obstacles to effective delivery of ECD services have been a poor implementation plan of early childhood development services in the poorest communities. This consequently leaves rural areas lagging behind because they are underfunded (Draper et al, 2011).

The second obstacle is the failure of community based ECD centres to meet criteria inspection of childcare facilities to ensure that they comply with municipality health and safety standards which is crucial for an ECD program site to be registered (Salga, 2012: 10). Poor communities lack resources to upgrade facilities and this prevents community based ECD centres from receiving the ECD centre subsidy that is accessible only to registered ECD programs with the Department of Social Development (Salga, 2012). The NIP intended to resolve the challenge of poor coordinated service delivery but the period set out to achieve this was not realistic. There is still much needed to achieve the transformation of a very complex, fragmented and poorly resourced sector. Following up on the progress of the ECD sector with the goal of integrated service delivery results have shown that different sectors continue to work in isolation (Richter, 2012).

The ECD policy emphasises preschool reception year known as grade R for children who are 5 turning 6 in the admission year (Berry et al, 2013). This emphasis on a preschool reception year has left children who are 5 years and younger with inadequate access to ECD service provision. The strategic plan for intersectional collaboration as a result strives to provide quality early learning for children 5 years and younger. The government also has a national ECD policy which attempts to improve the lives of young children. However current service provision is not sufficient to curb developmental risks encountered by poor children (Richter, 2012). The Children's Act describes the role of local municipalities as being one of providing ECD programs. The provincial government is responsible for allocating functions to local government trickling down to municipalities and districts regarding designated roles in ECD implementation (Children's Amendment Act No.41 section 92(1), 2007). The Act was implemented in 2010 but functions to local municipalities have not yet been assigned.

More still, ECD services also suffer from a number of other challenges; these challenges include spatial, racial and income disparities in service access and quality (Atmore et al, 2012). In its bid to curb some of these challenges, the Department of Social Development directs most ECD funding to poor children in ECD centres. In spite of this, access to these services tends to be of lower quality for younger and poorer children (Biersteker, 2012). Subsidies for poor children attending registered ECD centres have increased from R422 million in year 2007/2008 to R1.6 billion in 2013/2014 (Berry et al, 2013). While the focus of government expenditure with regards to ECD on the poor can be lauded as progress, the fact that these subsidies do not adequately reach the poorest and youngest of children who mostly do not have access to registered ECD centres is still a cause for concern. Poor infrastructure is said to prevent many ECD facilities from registering and accessing the subsidisation from the Department of Social Development (Department of Social Development, 2015). Lack of funding for infrastructure concurrently hampers the establishments of ECD programs in poor communities (Jamieson et al, 2010). ECD infrastructure development can receive funding from local government through the municipal infrastructure grant but this remains a challenge because local government is not accountable by law to build ECD infrastructure in areas with the greatest need (Salga, 2012).

2.4 DESIRED OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN FROM BIRTH TILL FOUR YEARS

Children need to learn how to think critically, solve problems and form concepts; children also need to develop the ability of communicating effectively and using language confidently. As children learn about mathematical concepts, they begin to demonstrate physical and motor abilities (Burger, 2010). Cognitive skills begin with problem solving, developing memory, sorting and classification from the basis for early mathematical skills (Draper et al, 2011). The development of skills similarly occurs through language and activities such as counting games, pattern recognition and shapes. Early language development forms the function for strong literacy and mathematics skills (Saide, 2010). Early language development is also said to occur when children interact with parents, caregivers and childcare providers (Jamieson et al, 2010). ECD is therefore critical in a child's holistic development.

Playing is often regarded as the foundation of learning because it stimulates imagination and exploration (Atmore et al, 2012). Playing, watching and listening create the foundation of learning in young children. Supportive caregivers engage children by talking to them and listening to them; the latter is considered a vital component. With regards to sensory-motor development, this occurs when infants, toddlers have access to materials and objects that they can manipulate and explore (Kuhne et al, 2013).

The early social exchanges both foster developing verbal language skills and non-verbal skills that provide a vital foundation for children's school readiness (Kuhne et al, 2013). Reading aloud to children in early years is importantly associated with language growth, early literacy and reading achievement in the school years (Ilifa Labantwana Organisation, 2013). Storytelling and reading also aid to develop a child's imagination; and this is regarded as the basis for innovation and discovery. Motor skills development is correspondingly crucial for physical activities as they foster development of listening, speaking, attention, emotional control, visual motor and visual thinking skills (Britto et al, 2011). In sum, all the above stated skills prepare the brain for reading, writing and mathematics.

Another important supposition is that learning among young children occurs in response to the people who care for them (Rule and Bhana, 2013). The home environment is therefore also important in providing stimulation that encourages learning and prepares children for school. As a result, children raised in households with little access to resources, services, and education are inadequately prepared for schooling (Spaull, 2012). Promoting early learning

thus needs prioritization in holistic development including sensory and motor development, communication, early language, literacy and cognitive development.

2.5 DEFINITION OF PARENT PARTICIPATION

Parent participation occurs in two categories: school-centred and home-centred parent involvement. School-centred parent involvement entails parents participating in classroom activities, school events, work of the school and school governance (Mawere et al, 2015:1547). On the other hand, home-centred parent involvement is active parenting in the home including the provision of a stable, secure environment for the child. Parents participate in activities with their children such as assisting children with homework, providing children with proper nutrition, healthcare, intellectual stimulation and parent-child discussion (Hornby, 2002 cited in Mawere et al, 2015:1547). Although the definition splits into two segments: school-centred and home-centred parent involvement, Eldridge combines these two segments in the definition of parent involvement by emphasising the organisational aim where parents provide practical help in the organisation, implementation of activities inside and outside the centre (Eldridge, 2001).

Furthermore, education practitioners define parent involvement as parents participating in various activities in their children's intervention program and plan (Berger, 2000). Parents have a legal right to advocate for their children by playing an active role in the decision making process regarding what type of program to enrol their children in. Eldridge (2001) agrees with this statement by defining democratic partnership as focusing on giving parents a voice in education, parents being part of the decision making process regarding the full operation of the ECD centre. Shumba et al (2014) also agree with this definition by highlighting the main principle which emphasises that parents have the responsibility to meet the needs of the child and advocate for partnership between parents and other caregivers for the success of ECD programs.

Another interesting definition is one that looks at parent participation as a process where schools and parents work by complementing each other in stimulating children's curiosity, motivation and development (Eldridge, 2001). This entails harmonisation of childrearing together with an educational approach at home and at an ECD centre. Parents, caregivers and ECD teachers need to listen to each other and openly share knowledge about children.

Christenson and Sheridan (2001) argue that there are many different definitions, models and traditions, which explain the meaning of parental involvement. The term involvement brings confusion because it can be associated with participation, partnership, collaboration or cooperation.

2.5.1 PARENTS PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

A study conducted in the Eastern Cape in Mdansane District aimed to explore parental perceptions concerning ECD provisioning in early childhood centres. The questions focused on parents' perceptions of the role of ECD centres and parents' perceptions on their participation in ECD centre activities (Shumba et al, 2014). The study interviewed four sampled female parents in total. A major finding was that parents perceive the ECD centre as a place where their children gain access to food. This was a reference to the feeding scheme provided in ECD consisting of three meals per day for the children (Shumba et al, 2014).

Parents who often sent their children to ECD centre for food explained that they were unable to afford to buy food and experienced food shortages in their household towards the end of the month (Shumba et al, 2014). This indicates that parents were not coping economically and a further indication is that children who are part of households with low incomes are prone to food insecurity and poverty. ECD centres were also viewed by these parents and caregivers as care facilities for their children (Department of Social Development, 2015). While children are being cared for in ECD centres parents have time to carry out other activities such as completing household chores and taking care of ill family members. Primarily, parents sent their children to ECD centres to enable them free time to fulfil other duties and responsibilities (Shumba et al, 2014). However, this is contradictory to good child rearing practices suggested in parenting skills, where parents are encouraged to spend quality time with their children for the psycho-emotional balance of the child (Department of Social Development, 2012). Perhaps another argument could be that parents living in poverty are under stressful conditions that hinder their ability to be nurturing and caring parents (National Planning Commission, 2011).

Parents interviewed in this study also viewed ECD centres as a place of safety for their children during the day. One of the participants emphasised that in the residential area there were high rates of rape and the ECD centre was an alternate place of safety that they trusted (Shumba et al, 2014). The preceding view accentuates the fact that ECD centres are places of

safety for children. This view is supported by the National Integrated Plan that records one of the services of ECD centres to be the provision of protection for children (National Integrated Plan, 2005). ECD centres are also identified by parents as a place where children have their values inculcated such as learning to pray before they eat (Shumba et al, 2014).

2.5.2 PARENTS PARTICIPATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The above cited study also reveals that parents' participation in ECD programs was home-centred, where parents would assist their children by showing them how to hold a pen or crayon correctly (Shumba et al, 2014). This suggested that parents were aware of the basic skills children learn in ECD centres. The participation of parents was purely on psychomotor skills. The main areas of parents' participation in ECD centres which remain salient are parenting skills, communication to and from school, parents volunteering, decision-making and collaborating with the community (Mawere et al, 2015:1553). This demonstrated that there is a gap in school-centred parent participation. However, Shumba et al (2014:6) state that, "educational involvements of families includes participation in activities that parents conduct at home and in early childhood settings to directly and indirectly support their children's learning".

The barriers of parent participation in the Eastern Cape study includes tiredness because parents were working during the day and or performing household chores and caring for ill family members. Illiteracy is cited as another barrier that hinders the ability of parents to help their children in school activities including reading and writing (Biersteker, 2012). Poor parent participation also occurred because parents lacked awareness and knowledge of what is required to assist their children (Pitt et al, 2013). Parents perceived participation in centre activities as the responsibility of the centre manager (Shumba et al, 2014). Parents were unwilling to participate because of the perception of their involvement as interfering with the function of the ECD centre. They also believed that the centre manager should communicate and delegate what the parents' role should be. The study concluded that parents do not have a sense of ownership of activities carried out in ECD centres causing a negative impact on their participation in ECD programs (Shumba et al, 2014).

2.5.3 ROLE OF PARENTS

The critical role of parents in early childhood development was explored in a preliminary qualitative review conducted in Cape Town informal settlements. This review looked at a therapeutic programme for preschool children and their parents in severely under-resourced contexts. Three workshop sessions were conducted which lasted two hours each involving parents. The parent workshops focused on demonstrating the development milestones of children and the required child development for children to be ready for school (Pitt et al, 2013). The main goal was to provide support to parents in order to enable them to help their children's developmental needs at home and to complement the work done by teachers in the classroom. The study aimed to understand what causes poor parent-school contact resulting in parents being unaware or unable to help prepare their children for formal schooling (Biersteker et al, 2010). The workshop approach provided key experience to parents on the necessary skills their children needed to develop.

The results of the study showed that many of the children did not attend school regularly. Teachers encountered a lack of participation and commitment by parents (Biersteker et al, 2010). The gap between the development of children in low, middle and high socio-economic areas was evident. What became apparent is that children from high socio-economic areas received adequate early learning stimulation and they were better prepared for formal school in comparison to children from low socio-economic areas (O'Carroll and Hickmen, 2012). The reason for the differences between the socio-economic areas was that children in higher socio-economic areas go home after school to a stimulating environment, where they can reinforce their fine motor skills through having access to crayons or different crafts at home (Letseka, 2010).

Results from the parent workshops showed that parents were surprised at how much their children needed to know for grade one (Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2013). They were able to gain an understanding of the developmental milestones their children needed to achieve. They were able to comment on the gaps between what they saw in their children and what was expected for school readiness. Parents responded by saying that they had learnt through playing and practical group work how to engage in activities with their children to get them ready for school (Pitt et al, 2013). One of the parents commented on how he / she realised that it was not only the responsibility of teachers to educate the child but parents need to

participate as well. Another parent realised they had an idea of how to assist when the child had a problem and how to fix it (Pitt et al, 2013).

However, the Cape Town study experienced challenges in that the knowledge of parents varied within the group activities done. This showed that parenting programs are crucial in bridging the gap between what parents understand as education and what the Department of Education expects as child education outcomes (Biersteker, 2011).

An Integrated Parenting Framework compiled by the Department of Social Development defines parenting, “as the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood” (Department of Social Development, 2010:2). Parenting is the activity of raising a child. A crucial aspect of parenting emphasised by the Department of Social Development is the transmission of social skills. During socialisation, children gain social skills such as greeting people or asking for help (Churchill and Lippman, 2016). The advocacy of social skills transmission to children is crucial because it equips children to be effective in handling situations and it makes them better at getting along with people (Department of Social Development, 2012). The development of social skills in children is further stated as pertinent because the child learns self-control. Parents play a key role in the early stimulation of their young children. This aids children to have growth and success in education. Early learning of a child predominantly comes from children being involved in different activities and household duties. Parents who observe their children play or join them in play have an opportunity to understand how children learn and grow (Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2013). This enables parents to learn to communicate more efficiently with their children and this is a vital component of ECD.

2.5.4 EFFECTIVE PARENTING

The availability of good childcare for children in early years has been described as crucial to a child’s wellbeing and development. Parenting programs are thus fundamental as an essential package of early childhood development service (Ilifa Labantwana Organisation, 2013). Parenting programs encapsulate interventions that include efforts to improve parents’ knowledge of young children’s development, stimulation for early learning, management of children’s behaviour and their relationship with their children (Berry et al, 2013). Children

are dependent on their parents for the provision of their needs. These needs include food, adequate hygiene, clothes, nurturing, intellectual stimulation and safety. When children obtain these needs, they are well prepared to succeed at school and in the long term grow to become productive adults (Burger, 2010).

On the contrary, child abuse and neglect are described as a result of poor parenting. They have the capability of increasing the body's stress response causing the child's brain and other organs to be harmed (Letseka, 2010). Other consequences of child abuse also include an increased physical or mental illness in children and this creates other problems such as delinquency (Walker et al, 2011). Supporting effective parenting has long-term cost saving benefits. As parents become good parents to their children, the state saves costs to the health system in treating illnesses and costs to the criminal justice system in dealing with crime is also reduced (Atmore et al, 2012). Good care giving consists of adequate nutrition, affection, stimulation and freedom from exposure to violence (Ewec Technical Paper, 2015:4). Good parenting also means being responsive towards children, parents need to be equipped with what to do. In the South African context, it is often supposed that parenting occurs under the following conditions: poverty, poor health and single parenthood (Berry et al, 2013). These factors may increase the stress of parenting which is likely going to result in poor outcomes for child development.

International parenting programmes provide parent skills on appropriate disciplining measures that include using time out instead of spanking as a way of disciplining the child for example (Churchill and Lippman, 2016). This is effective and improves parenting skills. Parenting programs have been delivered through home visits as well as via programs aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect. A case in point is the use of media intervention such as television broadcasts (Berry et al, 2013).

Most parenting programs additionally target prevention of child behaviour problems (Department of Social Development, 2012). When a child has already encountered problems such as child abuse and neglect, there is a need for intensive parenting programs. The challenge with intensive programs is affordability; they are expensive, must be delivered by trained workers and reach several families at once (Ilifa Labantwana Organisation, 2011). In South Africa, parent training programs are concentrated in urban areas and are not of adequate quality (Berry et al, 2013). This further shows that parenting programs are poorly

distributed and inaccessible for the poor. Further shortfalls are that few parenting programs conduct a formal assessment. NPOs that deliver parenting programs are unable to adopt the proven best approaches to parenting programs because they had minimal financial resources (Berry et al, 2013). This hinders the ability of NPOs to implement an effective monitoring and evaluation process (Atmore et al, 2012).

2.6 EVALUATIVE STUDIES OF INTERNATIONAL ECD PROGRAMS

Studies about international ECD programs revealed various interesting points about the effects and limits of early childhood education. Head Start is a state funded preschool program in the USA that targets disadvantaged children with the aim of improving their skills so that they can begin schooling on equal footing with their more advantaged peers (Campbell et al, 2010). Head Start provides part-day programs for eligible 3 and 4 year olds. The Head Start program evaluative results showed substantial reduction in the use of special education for children who attended the program. Further results provided evidence where 68% of the children in the group who received preschool intervention graduated in high school compared to only 52% of the group of children that received no intervention (Currie, 2001).

Head Start followed children from grade 1 to the end of high school. The results displayed reduced high school dropout rates by 24% (Temple et al, 2000). In the Head Start program, white children received persistent gains in test marks as well as reductions in grade repetition. Initial gains in tests marks were the same for white and African American children. However, impact changed because of what happened to the children after they left the program. African American children attend poor quality schools following pre-schooling and the study showed that gains obtained at Head Start failed to be maximised (Currie, 2001).

Head Start participation is associated with an increased probability of completing high school and attending college among white children but a decrease in the probability for African American children charged for crime (Temple et al, 2000). Evidence supporting long-term impact of public programs is less conclusive than evidence showing positive effects of model programs. Some of the challenges were that the Head Start classroom quality was higher in programs with higher family incomes compared to families with lower family incomes (Currie, 2001). An argument provided has been that Head Start lacked sufficient funding to

allow for meaningful enforcement of program standards (Campbell et al, 2010). Gaps in the program were poor provision of a language rich environment which is crucial to prepare children's ability to learn and read for school readiness.

Another project carried out in the United State of America known as the Abecedarian Project enrolled high-risk infants from low income earning families. This was a longitudinal prospective study of the benefits of early childhood education intervention situated in a childcare setting. The project followed participants from birth until the age of 21 years, the original number of infants enrolled in the study was 111 but only 104 took part in the follow up (Campbell et al, 2010). The main domains measured by the study were intellectual level, academic skills, degree of self-sufficiency and social adjustments (Campbell et al, 2010:46). In early childhood through middle adolescence, cognitive benefits have been larger and more persistent among students who had received ECD services under the program. However, these benefits diminish in late childhood and adolescence (Northern Rivers Family Services, 2013). The results showed that both maths and reading marks increased in relation to the number of years children spent in the Abecedarian Project (Anderson, 2008).

The Abecedarian Project result outcomes essentially showed that children who had been in a preschool intervention programs had higher scores on tests, reductions in incidence of grade retention and special education classes (Anderson, 2008: 1489). The results also showed that these children had higher average test marks and were twice as likely to still be in school or have attended a fourth year college (Currie, 2001). The sample consisted of 98% African Americans; results showed that high quality educational childcare can make a substantial difference in the lives of young adults raised in poverty. Other benefits revealed by the study were that the participants were less likely to become teen parents (Campbell et al, 2010). This study was consistent with the theory that tested the hypothesis. The hypothesis basically suggests that if you enhance value of the early environment of a child this could enhance cognitive development ultimately leading to school success (Campbell et al, 2010). The gap in cognitive test marks for participants of the study and control group was largest for females than the males. Female children enrolled into the Abecedarian Project made greater educational progress in comparison to the female children that did not enrol in the study (Anderson, 2008:1483).

2.6.1 BENEFITS OF ECD PROGRAMS

As the studies reviewed above show, the potential benefits of enrolling a child in an ECD program, is the ability of the program to enhance early childhood development before school and assists in the transition to formal schooling (O'Caroll and Hickman, 2012). Attending preschool can improve academic performance in the first year at primary school. This prevents school dropout, has a positive impact on older girl's education and participation in the labour force (Biersteker and Harrison, 2014). A loss of potential intellectual development in early years through stunting creates gaps between more and less advantaged groups which emphasises the importance of targeting children in the first 5 years. This would assist to increase later developmental and education outcomes.

There is an increasing agreement about the importance of intervening to improve ECD but there is less agreement on what consists the most effective and efficient methods to adopt (Kuhne et al, 2013). Children who had accessed an ECD program benefited in cognitive development. The estimated cognitive impacts of the Abecedarian Project were as follows: 0.69 immediate impact, 0.35 between ages 5-10 and 0.28 beyond age 10 (Nores and Barnett, 2010). These results show short-term impact of early childhood development. Similarly, the possible short-term benefits provided by the Head Start program were improved health, nutrition, prevention of abuse and neglect of the children (Currie, 2001). The Abecedarian Project medium term benefits were preventing special education and grade repetition, long-term benefits were possible improvements in schooling, wages, reductions in crime and teen pregnancy (Campbell et al, 2010).

2.7 CONCLUSION

Children raised in poverty often encounter environments that lack stimulation. Poverty also adds stress to parents resulting in poor parenting, child neglect or abuse. Accessibility of ECD programs is crucial in mediating the negative outcomes of children raised in poor households. However, ECD programs may be scarcely available in rural areas and tend to be inaccessible because poor parents cannot afford to pay centre fees. Further challenges facing ECD include inequality where the numbers of children from high socio-economic households have easy to access ECD programs of adequate quality. It is in low socio-economic areas where ECD programs are poorly accessible and of poor quality. Parents' perceptions of ECD programs in low socio-economic areas looks at what ECD centres provide. South African

studies for example reveal that parents identify centres as places for their children to obtain food and safe childcare. Although these are positive attributes of what ECD centres provide it seems that there is a lack of knowledge on the part of parents in understanding about early learning and the stimulation provided by ECD programs. The participation of parents in ECD programs in South Africa remains poor. Evaluative studies of ECD carried out internationally provide clear evidence of the benefits of ECD programs in decreasing grade retention amongst other things.

2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.8.1 ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

This study applied the Ecological Systems theory, which used four environmental systems in which an individual interacts to understand the development of a child into adulthood. The ecological systems theory used a contextual approach. The contextual approach aimed to understand how systems consisting of biological, physical and sociocultural settings affected development. This study used Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to understand influential factors that affect child development emanating from experiences arising in the child's immediate surroundings (Bukatko and Daehler, 2001). This theory emphasized the importance of understanding child development in terms of the everyday environment children live in. The theory focused on the following settings found in the microsystem: home, school, neighbourhood and community. It also considered systems that exist at several different but interrelated levels. These include the following ecological systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. This study explored the ecological systems with particular emphasis on the child's immediate surroundings.

“The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive mutual accommodation, throughout the life span between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives, as this process is affected by relations obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social context both formal and informal in which the settings are embedded” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977:514).

The ecological environment basically consists of a pattern arrangement of structures, while a setting is a place with particular physical features where the developing person engaged in activities (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

MICROSYSTEM

The microsystem is a pattern of activities and interpersonal relations experienced by a child in face-to-face interactions in its immediate surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This system focuses on the direct impact the environment exerts on the developing child. The microsystem examines the home setting, the relationship a child has with family, household members and the neighbourhood. The school environment provides an educational setting, which explores structural factors like the classroom arrangement and the relationship the child has with the teacher and peers (Bukatko and Daehler, 2001). The major supposition is that child development occurs through interactions between an active child, household members, peers and objects in the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These interactions in the immediate environment explain proximal processes. Examples of patterns of proximal processes consist of parent-child, child-child activities demonstrated through playing, reading, learning new skills and athletic activities (Bronfenbrenner, 1994:38). In the microsystem, the proximal processes function to create and sustain development and influence the content and structure of a microsystem.

MESOSYSTEM

The mesosystem consists of linkages and processes occurring between two or more settings with respect to the developing child (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The mesosystem examines relations that occur in the settings between home, school and workplace and how they influence the development of the child. The mesosystem consists of interrelationships that occur in the microsystem. An example is family characteristics or the opportunities accessible to a child. The argument therein is that a child who has access to academic resources such as books or educational toys will be able to develop reading and socialization skills more effectively (Bukatko and Daehler, 2001). This sort of opportunity is further affirmed to have a critical impact on the child's experiences and success in another system.

EXOSYSTEM

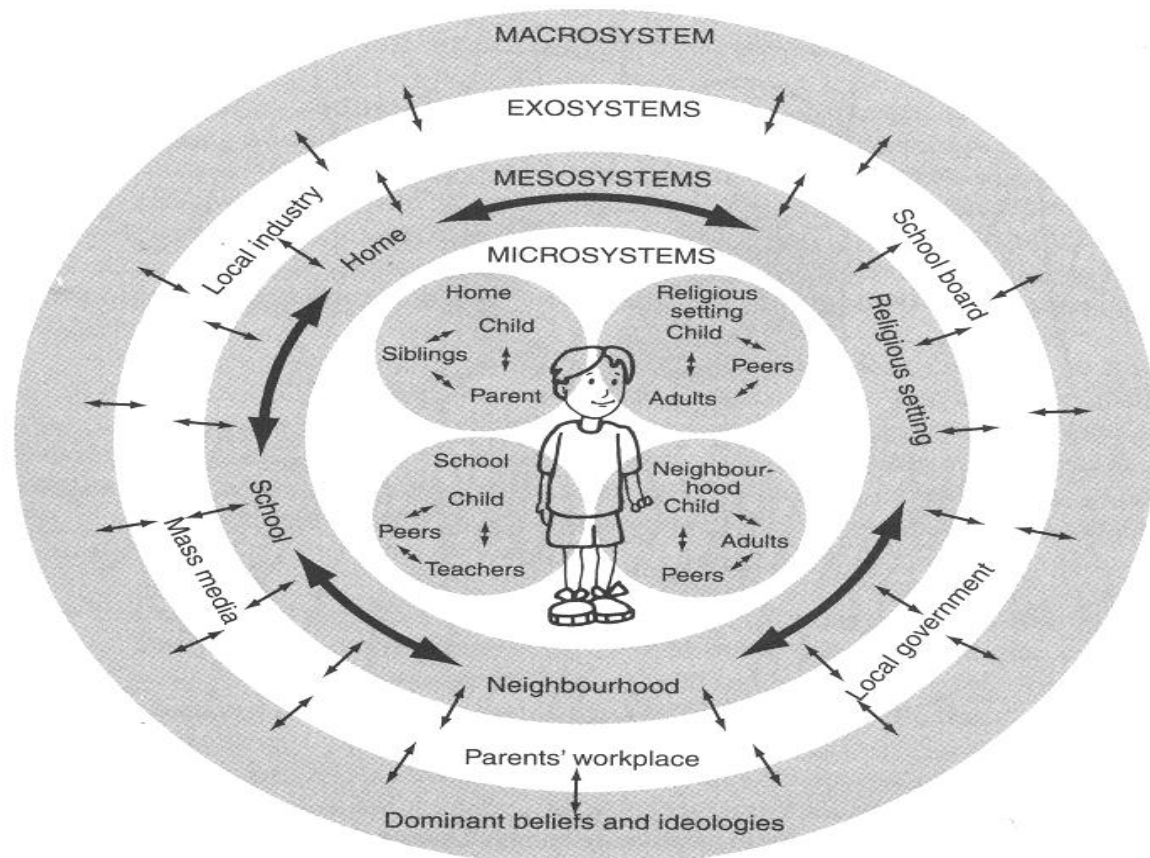
The exosystem also consists of linkages and process taking place between two or more settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This system does not however have direct interactions with

the child, but influences the child indirectly through events occurring in its context. This affects proximal processes in the immediate setting containing the child. Bukatko and Daehler (2001: 26) state that, “social, economic, political, and religious settings in which the child is not personally involved but that directly bear on those who interact with the child can also influence development”. For example how would the parent’s work environment affect the relationship the parent has with the child. It is important to note that there is an overlap that occurs between the systems. The child had no direct interactions with the parent’s work environment but if the parent encountered a problem at work, they may bring frustrations home and express them through interactions with the child (Fraser, 2004).

MACROSYSTEM

The macrosystem contains patterns of the microsystem, mesosystem and ecosystem with a particular focus on characteristics of belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, opportunity structures, hazards and options embedded in each of these broader systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994:40). This system examines a broader context consisting of spiritual, religious values, legal, political practices and customs shared by a cultural group. This particularly looks at cultural beliefs about child rearing, the role of schools and family in education. This view emphasises how ethical and moral values of a society influence the child directly through child rearing practices of child caregivers (Odom and Wolery, 2003). Indirect impact is this system occurs through cultural norms and structures that define acceptable and desirable behaviour. These four systems do not remain constant over time but change when famines, wars, natural disasters occur as these events disrupt the interrelated systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1997).

Figure 1



Source: (Harkonen, 2007).

The diagram above demonstrates that different circles of the environment surrounding the child influencing the development of the child. These circles were the four interrelated systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. The double pointed arrows show the interrelated relationship of the ecological systems. This means that what occurs in the microsystem impacts what happens in the mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. The arrows also show that the interactions that occur among and between the four system layers are bi-directional. The child at the centre of the diagram has active interrelations with the ecological systems and the settings found within the layers. The child is an active player exerting influence on the environment. However, the environment also influences the development of a child. The ecological systems consist of different settings found inside each layer; these settings have reciprocal relations with each component within the settings. An example from the microsystem shows the following settings: home, religious context, school and neighbourhood. The settings found within each layer of the systems show a two dimensional interactive relationship, 'from' the child and 'towards' the child.

2.8.2 ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY: EVOLUTION FROM ECOLOGY TO BIOECOLOGY

The Ecological systems theory was in a continual state of development resulting in the refined bioecological theory. The bioecological theory looked at how human development occurred. This theory emphasised the importance of studying the setting in which the developing person spent time in (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). This involved observing the relations the developing person has with other people in the same setting. The theory also looked at personal characteristics of the developing person and those surrounding him/her in the process-person-context-time model.

PROXIMAL PROCESSES

Proximal processes are interactions the child had with people in the immediate surrounding the child lived in. Proximal processes also extended to the interactions the child had with objects and symbols in their immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). The main people the child interacted with in the immediate environment were parents, caregivers, relatives, siblings and peers. Human development occurred through increasingly complex reciprocal interactions between an active developing child and the persons, objects and symbols in the immediate environment (Tudge et al, 2009). In order for effective child development, interactions in the immediate environment need to occur on a regular basis over an extensive period of time (Krishnan, 2010). This process consisted of interrelations between the child and its immediate surroundings. The interrelations occurring in the process become key drivers of development. Proximal processes encompassed the family ability's to support the child and interact with the settings the child lived in. An example was the ability of the family to access community resources that provided support to the development of a child (Harkonen, 2007). These community resources could be clinic facilities, day care facilities and children's toy libraries.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILD

Personal characteristics of the developing individual were divided into three components; these were demand, resource and force. Demand characteristics consisted of age, gender, skin colour and physical appearance (Tudge et al, 2009). Resource characteristics consisted of mental and emotional components. These were skills, intelligence of the child and experiences. Material resources included access to food, housing, caring parents and

educational opportunities (Krishnan, 2010). Force characteristics were the differences in temperament, motivation and persistence present in the child. Although two children could have equal personal characteristics, their developmental outcomes will not be the same. One child may be motivated and persistent, while the other child may not be motivated or persistent in school tasks for example, this affected school success resulting in different outcomes (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006).

TIME CHARACTERISTICS INFLUENCING CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Time consists of chronological age, duration and nature of periodicity (Krishnan, 2010). Time is what occurs during the course of an activity or interaction between the child and the immediate surrounding the child lives in. Bronfenbrenner (1999:20) states that, “the individual’s own developmental life course is seen as embedded in and powerfully shaped by conditions and events occurring during the historical period through which the person lives”. An event can have varying levels of impact on the development of a child and impact can decrease or increase as time progresses. An example is a parent’s divorce or sudden change of residence which could affect the development of the child.

2.9 ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT SUITABLE TO THE STUDY

The primary nurturing environment for a child is the home with family members (Odom and Wolery, 2003). The microsystem becomes crucial in understanding how the family environment affects early learning and stimulation of the child. This also becomes an opportunity to explore why accessibility of ECD programs in rural areas was lower than in urban settings. This study focused on what barriers parents encounter when trying to enrol their children in an ECD program and how these challenges affect the development of the child. The study avers that experiences that children have as they interact with the environment provide opportunities for learning. In affirmation is the view by Odom and Wolery (2003: 4) who state that, “for infants and young children, contingently responsive toys, physical environments, and social interactions are positive forces in promoting learning and development”.

Teachers recognise that development of social competence in young children is a crucial skill that enabled children to learn. Social competence is demonstrated when children developed

the skill of managing their behaviour by listening to a teacher's instructions and working with their peers in school (Hindman et al, 2010). Parent involvement in home and school environments together with levels of education parents possess improve ECD program outcomes. When parents interacted at home with their children through activities like book reading, teaching about letters and numbers they introduce literacy skills to their children (Hindman et al, 2010). As parents interacted with teachers at ECD centres and participated in centre activities, they could teach their children skills and knowledge that complemented the curriculum of ECD programs taught by teachers at crèche. The benefits of using the ecological model of human development hinges on the fact that it goes beyond direct observation of a person in one place. The model adopts a multi-person systems approach considering aspects of the environment beyond the immediate surroundings of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1997:2).

2.10 CRITIQUES OF ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM THEORY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

There are a number of aspects of the ecological systems theory which require attention with regards to their application. The microsystem consisted of family settings, which were the first point of contact for the child. Above the family level, it became challenging to differentiate which systems ranked higher or lower. It was unclear what constituted the school system, was it pre-school, primary school, or the entire schooling system (Fraser, 2004). In the ecological system diagram, the child/developing person was at the centre, surrounded by concentric circles, which represented the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. Multiple arrows connected these circles to context within ecological systems.

The arrows also created linkages across systems. The challenge with the diagram was that it became too complex. This occurred because the ecological system diagram required extensive ecological detail to build meaning of a child's environment (Darling, 2007). It was difficult to select environments objectively to observe as a researcher. Different environments within the ecological systems have different impacts on a child and a child's response differs in the setting found within the environments. This caused the researcher to struggle in objectively choosing an environment to observe but rather chose a particular process and outcomes of the ecological systems model to observe (Darling, 2007).

The theory of human development from inception emphasised that the developing person influences and is influenced by the environment. The immediate environment found within the microsystem was the family, which played a key role in the development of a child. The human development theory in its primary stage however gave little attention to biological and cognitive factors in the developmental process of a child (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). The theory evolved to bioecological theory, which focused on the study of proximal processes by highlighting positive attributes of child development while neglecting negative outcomes of the same process (Rosa and Tudge, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) questioned his own proposition of the ecological model of human development and shifted his attention to distinct phases in the bioecological theory. This later revision of the theory no longer concentrated on a description of different contexts in the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Tudge et al, 2009). The limitation of this theory was that it became difficult to evaluate all components empirically especially proximal processes (Rosa Tudge, 2013:244). Another limitation of the ecological systems theory was that human development was predominantly dependant on environmental factors; there were minor discussion on how the environment influenced the child's biological characteristics (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). There was a lack of substantiated evidence, which pointed out how each of the systems were interrelated. The bioecological theory neglected to explain how the macrosystem, which consists of cultural and subcultural values and practices, influenced the process of development (Rosa and Tudge, 2013).

This study utilised the Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory because the environment children lived in and played in had a crucial role in their development outcomes. Although the ecological systems theory had limitations, it remained relevant in this study as it looked at the bi-directional interactions that occurred between the child and ecological systems as well as the settings found within each layer.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology refers to the theoretical, political and philosophical backgrounds to social research and their implication for research practice and for the use of particular research methods (Petty et al, 2012:1). This chapter is focused on the research methodology undertaken in this study. The methodology looked at how the study was conducted, types of sampling methods used, how data was collected and analysed. This study used qualitative research method; data was obtained through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The structure of this chapter is as follows: a detailed description of the research setting followed by the research approach consisting of sampling methods, data collection, inclusion and exclusion criteria, ethical considerations, data analysis, validity, reliability and study limitations.

3.2 RESEARCH SETTING

The research took place at Bekezela Creche which has an early childhood development program. Bekezela Creche is located in Zagqayeni area in Maphumulo. Maphumulo is located in the Ilembe district in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. Maphumulo means a place of rest, the area is mainly rural consisting of tribal land administered by Ingonyama Trust (Ilembe IDP, 2015). Maphumulo municipality is located to the north of Tugela River and spreads 30km to the south near Ndwedwe local municipality. There are 11 traditional authorities' areas and wards in the municipality (Maphumulo IDP, 2014).

Figure 1.2 Map of Maphumulo Local Municipality



(Source: <https://www.localgovernment.co.za/locals/view/72/maphumulo-local-municipality#map>)

3.2.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF MAPHUMULO

The population of Maphumulo declined from 120643 in 2001 to 96724 in 2011 (Maphumulo Local Economic Development Strategy, 2015). However statistics South Africa captured an increase in the population size of South Africa from 4481977 in 2001 to 51770561 in 2011 (Maphumulo Local Economic Development Strategy, 2015). The decline in Maphumulo population size can be attributed to outward migration where people move from a rural area to urban areas such as Ethekwini, Mandeni and KwaDukuza.

3.2.2 AGE STRUCTURE

The number of people in the age category 15-64 increased from 49.6% in 2001 to 52.9% in 2011 (Ilembe IDP, 2015). However, the number people under the age of 15 decreased from 44.1% in 2001 to 40.6% in 2011 (Maphumulo Local Economic Development Strategy, 2015:44). The number of people in the age category of 65 and above increased slightly from 6.3% to 6.5% in 2011 (Maphumulo IDP, 2014). This meant that the municipality needs to consider increasing service provision to the elderly.

3.2.3 HOUSEHOLD SIZE

GENDER DISTRIBUTION

Maphumulo gender distribution in percentage was 52% female and 48% male (Ilembe IDP, 2015). There are more females than males in Maphumulo; this was reflected in a 2011 statistics that shows that 62% of the households in Ilembe district are headed by females (Maphumulo IDP, 2014). The average household size was 4.8 in 2011.

HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

The number of households with formal dwellings increased from 22.9% in 2001 to 40.8% in 2011 (Maphumulo local economic development strategy, 2015). Although this increase suggested improvement in formal housing, this percentage still remained below the district target which was 64.4% (Ilembe IDP, 2015). This demonstrated that there are a large number of people in Maphumulo who lived in informal dwellings.

3.2.4 EDUCATION LEVELS

Maphumulo has 74 primary schools and 36 secondary schools. The schools are dispersed and often difficult to access due to poor roads. Maphumulo is characterised by low levels of higher education. However, illiteracy declined from 33% in 2001 to 16% in 2011 (Maphumulo Local Economic Development Strategy, 2015:49). Higher education levels were as follows: 6% in 2001 to 5% in 2011, Primary enrolment increased from 92% in 2001 to 96% in year (Maphumulo Local Economic Development Strategy, 2015:49). Factors that can be attributed to low levels of higher education were high drop-out rates of children entering secondary education because of alcohol abuse, drug addiction and poverty (Maphumulo IDP, 2014). Another main factor was that many families are unable to afford the cost of relocating their children to other towns to obtain tertiary education because there is no tertiary institution in Maphumulo (Ilembe IDP, 2015).

3.2.5 EMPLOYMENT LEVELS

The overall unemployment rate in Maphumulo decreased from 76% in 2001 to 49% in 2011 (Maphumulo Local Economic Development Strategy, 2015). The broad youth unemployment rate was 58% in 2011 (Maphumulo IDP, 2014). However the decline does not mean that young people have been absorbed into the labour market. This decrease in unemployment was as a result of emigration; as people leave Maphumulo in search for employment opportunities in urban areas and deaths related to poverty and HIV/AIDS (Maphumulo Local Economic Development Strategy, 2015:49). The low absorption into the labour force in Maphumulo has caused loss of human capital due to emigration, leaving the municipality with a shortage of skilled people, and weakening its ability to grow the local economy (Ilembe IDP, 2015). Household income levels were relatively low in the Ilembe district with 40% households received no income. The majority of the population live on R500 a month (Ilembe IDP, 2015). Social grants were the main income which supports poor households (Ilembe IDP, 2015:90).

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative method provides an opportunity for the researcher to understand multiple realities through an in-depth approach to a particular phenomenon (Vaismoradi et al, 2013: 398). Qualitative methodology was suitable to this study because the study's aim was to understand how parents view ECD programs and how they participated in them. A qualitative study

enabled the researcher to obtain participants perceptions. This was important because the researcher will gain an understanding of ECD programs from the perspective of the participants who had children enrolled in ECD programs. Structured individual interviews were useful when the researcher wanted to explore in-depth the experiences of participants (Pretty et al, 2012).

Qualitative research involved the collection, analysis and interpretation of data that cannot be easily reduced into numbers. These are data related to the social world, the concepts and behaviours of people within it (Erickson, 2012). However qualitative research methods have been criticised for its excessive use of interviews and focus group discussions with little application of other methods like ethnography, observations and document analysis (Pretty et al, 2012). The first strength of using qualitative research method was that a phenomenon can be examined in detail and in-depth (Acharya et al, 2013). The second strength was that the researcher can use interviews with room to ask follow-up questions from the participants.

The flexible nature of qualitative method allowed the researcher to revise research methodology as new information emerges (Pretty et al, 2012). The complexities of participants' lives can be discovered and captured well through a qualitative approach. A qualitative study entails data is collected from a sample of participants; and this means that findings cannot be generalised to a larger population however it can be translated to another setting (Petty, 2012:2).

Data was collected through individual in-depth interviews as they were useful when the researcher wanted to explore in-depth the experiences and views of participants (Abrams, 2010). The total number of parents interviewed was 20. These parents were divided into 2 groups consisting of 10 parents per group. Group A had parents who had enrolled their children at Bekezela Crèche and Group B had parents who had not enrolled their children in any ECD program. In addition, 3 key informants from the Department of Social Development were interviewed. A Structured questionnaire was used which consisted of open and closed questions.

Two small focus group discussions were also used to collect data. They offered the researcher insight to the research topic while giving the participants a platform to share their experiences (Colucci, 2007). The first focus group consisted of 4 teachers from Bekezela Crèche and the

second focus group consisted of 3 parents who are part of the governing-body of the crèche. Bekezela Crèche was particularly selected because their ECD program was registered and subsidized by the Department of Social Development in Maphumulo.

3.3.1 SAMPLING

This study used convenience sampling because it was convenient to the researcher. Convenience sampling gave allowance for the researcher to invite key informants to be part of the study. This aided the researcher to sample participants that shared a common goal which was that they had enrolled their children in an ECD program at Bekezela Creche. This helped in identifying generated patterns of parents' perceptions and participation in ECD programs. The researcher sought to examine these perceptions to see what impact they have on parents' participation and accessibility of ECD programs.

The researcher was able to obtain a list of all parents who had enrolled their children for ECD from the Bekezela Creche manager. The researcher used convenience sampling to select 10 parents to be participants of the study. This was influenced by the willingness of the parents to be interviewed and the availability of these parents. The first group of 10 parents were labelled as group A. The researcher ensured that the sample of participants for the study consisted of parents who were employed and unemployed. This was an attempt to capture employed parents' perceptions because they are the group that are often hard to include in the study as they are working and difficult to find. Group B consisted of 10 parents who had not enrolled their children in ECD programs in the area of Maphumulo; snow ball sampling was used to find these parents.

Key informants from the Department of Social Development were chosen by researcher to be interviewed as they work with community based organisations providing early childhood development programs to children from age group 2-4. They were considered by the researcher to be the most knowledgeable on early childhood development in Maphumulo.

Two focus group discussions were conducted where the researcher used purposive sampling to select participants. The first group consisted of four participants who were teachers at the Crèche. The second group consisted of five participants who were parents that were selected as the governing body of the Bekezela Crèche.

Snowball sampling entailed asking participants for recommendations of acquaintances who might qualify to participate in this study (Robinson, 2014). The researcher used convenience sampling to select the first group of parents to participate in the study. This was Group A which consisted of parents who had enrolled their children in an ECD program at Bekezela Crèche. Parents who were in Group A were asked by the researcher if they knew any parents who have children that were not enrolled in any ECD program. This enabled the researcher to recruit parents who would form Group B to participate in the study. Snowball sampling works through referral chains. This enabled the researcher to construct a frame from which to sample.

The benefit of using snowball sampling was that it enabled the researcher to find hard to reach people (Handcock and Gile, 2011). The researcher selected this method of sampling because it was less expensive and that it would have not been easy to know where to find parents who have young children that were not enrolled in any ECD program. The sample frame of Group B consisted of 10 parents who participated in the study. The purpose of using snowball sampling to recruit participants who form Group B was to capture views and perceptions of parents who had not enrolled their children in any ECD program. This was important to the researcher as such a group of parents in studies are often missed and yet their views are crucial. Group A and Group B parents were sampled so as to determine if there were similarities or differences in perceptions of ECD programs.

3.3.2 INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Group A participants were parents who had enrolled their children at the Bekezela Crèche. This was the Crèche the researcher selected to base her study. Bekezela Crèche has an ECD program that targeted children from the ages of 2 to 5 years old. The researcher focused on the age group 2 to 4 because this age category was placed in the responsibility of the Department of Social Development and ECD programs that were accessible for 2 to 4 year olds were privately owned (Atmore, 2012). This age group also had access to ECD programs owned by community based organisations (Atmore, 2012). Bekezela Crèche was recognised by the Department of Social Development as a community based organisation. Group A parents were given a letter that asked them to participate in the study and those parents who agreed were interviewed at the Bekezela Crèche manager's office.

Group B participants were parents who had children between the ages 2 to 4 who had not been enrolled in any ECD program in the area. The researcher approached these parents and asked if they would participate in the study. The parents who agreed to participate were interviewed in their homes. People who were excluded from participating in the study were parents who had children younger than 2 years. This was because studies have shown that children below the age of 2 were mostly cared for at home by caregivers (Berry et al, 2013). The overarching belief is that at such a young age, children benefited from being in a nurturing home environment as they were still dependant on parents to feed, wash and take care of them (Biersteker and Motala, 2011). People who were excluded from participating in the study were parents who had children who were 5 years old and above because government provided ECD programs in formal schooling as part of foundation phase. This occurred because children 5 years and older were the responsibility of the Department of Education (Atmore, 2012).

3.3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher submitted a proposal to the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee. The proposal provided an outline of the research study, where the researcher had to state data collection methods and how people were going to be recruited to participate in the study (Erickson, 2012). Once the Ethics Committee had reviewed the proposal to ensure that it complied with the ethical procedure of conducting research they provided ethical approval. The purpose of this was to ensure all ethical considerations were followed when collecting and analysing data.

Ethical measures involved gate keeper's letters and informed consent forms given to parents who agreed to participate. The preceding measure hinges on the notion that "consent that is genuinely informed and without coercion reduces the risk of social harm because it affirms the dignity and respect and agency of those who will be involved in the study" (Erickson, 2012: 1457). The researcher read out the consent form to the parents explaining that their participation was voluntary and that at any time they decided they no longer wanted to participate they were free to withdraw. The researcher also explained how the participants' confidentiality was guaranteed as their names were not used but they would be referred to as participants identified by using numbers e.g. participant 1. Gatekeeper's letters were also provided by the researcher which asked for written consent from two of the main community

stakeholders in the area of Maphumulo, the head of Department of Social Development and the Bekezela Crèche centre manager. The researcher also informed the Induna of Maphumulo and the community worker about her study in keeping with ethics.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was used for analysing data; it was mainly a descriptive approach which entailed identifying, analysing and reporting patterns that emerged from data in themed categories (Vaismoradi et al, 2013). The aim of thematic analysis was to critically examine narrative data given by participants by breaking the data into small units of content. This method was best suited for a qualitative study that aimed to capture thick descriptions of parents' perceptions and participation in ECD programs. The method also enabled the researcher to organise data obtained from interviews into themes that answered the research question.

The first step was collecting data from participant interviews and focus group discussions. Analysis of data consisted of transcribing interviews so as to be able to develop a coding system. Coding consisted of linking codes of data to create categories or themes (Smith and Firth, 2011). Codes and categories were developed by considering each line and phrase of the transcription in an attempt to summarise what participants were describing about ECD programs. Coding can be explained as breaking down the transcripts into fragments of themes and sub-themes for analysis (Smith and Firth, 2011.) This was an important process of data analysis as it allowed the researcher to gain relevant information that addressed the research aim and goals.

3.4.1 ENHANCING QUALITY OF STUDY

Validity meant ensuring integrity in the application of research methods and precision in which findings accurately reflected the data (Morse et al, 2002). The researcher used convenience and snowball sampling methods as they were well suited to collect primary data. The researcher also made use of thematic analysis to enhance quality in data findings. To improve the quality of study the research developed a series of questions to ask participants that were based on the research objectives.

The researcher interviewed participants in their home language isiZulu. This was to ensure that participants were able to fully express their perceptions meaningfully. This accommodated non-literate participants as they were able to respond verbally to questions being asked. Conducting the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in a language easily understood by participants ensured that responses were clear. The benefit of having face to face interviews was that they afforded the researcher flexibility to adapt questions as necessary and seek clarification to ensure responses were adequately understood.

The researcher used her phone to record interviews and focus group discussions and field notes to capture expressions, making sure that thick descriptions were recorded. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were employed to establish comparison so as to capture similarities and differences. This helped to ensure that different perspectives were represented. The use of previous studies carried out on ECD programs were also utilised to assess patterns that developed or changes noted.

3.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Research can be influenced by the researcher's personal biases making it difficult to maintain rigor (Pretty et al, 2012). The researcher clearly stated that sampling of key informants was based on researcher's judgement. The researcher has accounted for any biases by clearly stating where her judgement was used. This included the selection of Bekezela Crèche as the location to conduct study which was convenient to the researcher.

The researcher's presence in the data collection phase can affect participants' responses (Pretty et al, 2012). The researcher stayed in Maphumulo for an entire month the purpose was to familiarise herself with the community members. She also introduced herself to community gate keepers like the councillor, the Induna and community workers. These gatekeepers introduced the researcher to the parents who had enrolled their children at Bekezela Crèche. This was to create trust with the participants so they could be comfortable during in-depth interview and focus group discussions. The interviews were conducted in isiZulu and there were certain phrases that were difficult to translate into English. The researcher used an isiZulu dictionary in an attempt to make translation accurate. The researcher also consulted a teacher who teaches isiZulu and English to get clarity on certain phrases used so that no meaning is lost as a result of translation.

The main limitation of this study was that the sample size was small; as a result, findings cannot be generalised. The researcher was well aware that in a qualitative study findings cannot be generalised to the entire population however this was understood from the beginning of research. This research does not aim to generalise findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 PRESENTATION OF STUDY RESULTS

This chapter presents results from interviews and focus group discussion conducted with 30 participants. These participants include 20 parents, 3 key informants and 2 focus group discussions (7 respondents). The parents were divided into two groups, Group A were parents who had enrolled their children in an ECD centre based program while Group B were parents who had not enrolled their children in an ECD program. The 3 key informants were from the Department of Social Development in Stanger and Maphumulo. The 2 focus group discussions were divided between teachers of Bekezela Crèche and parents who form the governing body of the crèche. This chapter presents results as it aligns with the study's objectives which examine: the availability and accessibility of ECD programs; the extent to which parents understand and participate in these programs and the impact of ECD programs. The themes below emerged from the data collected from the 30 participants and were used to address the study objectives and research questions.

KEY INFORMANT PARTICIPANTS

4.2 AVAILABILITY OF ECD PROGRAMS

Maphumulo has 29 fully registered ECD programs and only 13 of these programs were funded (Key Informant 3). ECD programs have been divided into 3 categories: funded, fully registered and partially registered. There are 6 ECD programs still to be funded once they have met all the norms and standards required. However there were 4 conditionally registered ECD programs which were still trying to meet the norms and standards required (Key Informant 3). ECD programs that were registered with the Department of Social Development were more accessible to parents because they were visible on the map as they were on the Department's database. This greatly assisted when it came to checking the material used to educate children and monitoring of these programs (Key Informant 1). The Department discovered that many crèches were running in the homes of people thus were not registered. This made it difficult for the Department to fund these ECD programs as they were not complying with norms and standards required (Key Informant 2). A major benefit of ECD programs that were registered with the Department of Social Development was the ability of these ECD programs to apply for funding. Most of the ECD programs were located

in the community in Maphumulo and were within a walking distance with only a few where children need to use transport to access those crèches (Key Informant 3).

4.3 ACCESSIBILITY OF ECD PROGRAMS

The Department of Social Development has taken the responsibility of identifying places that need a crèche. One key informant stated that, “long time ago it used to be people who determined that we need a crèche here in the community. Then as a Department we go there and assess whether there is really a need for a crèche in the community” (Key Informant 3). However this occurred because the Department does not have enough financial resources to fund all crèches (Key Informant 3). “I asked the crèche manager to bring their documents to see their commitment then when these documents are submitted I go with an inspector to inspect the area the crèche is located in” (Key Informant 2). On a monthly basis ECD programs were monitored to evaluate the number of children who attended and to check accessibility.

4.4 NUMBER OF CHILDREN ENROLLED IN ECD PROGRAMS

The number of children an ECD centre was able to admit was influenced by the health inspector from the municipality who would inspect the physical structure in terms of space and how many toilets the centre has to determine enrolment (Key Informant 1). How many classrooms and teachers an ECD program had also determined the minimum and maximum number of children they were allowed to enrol. If a crèche has three classrooms the ratio of children per teacher or caregiver would be as follows: 3-4 year olds would have 2 teachers to 20 children per classroom (Key Informant 2).

4.5 CHALLENGES PARENTS EXPERIENCED WHEN ACCESSING ECD PROGRAMS

Lack of information was one of the challenges experienced by parents when accessing ECD services according to one key informant (Key Informant 2). Some parents were unwilling to provide their child’s immunisation card and identity documents because they thought that this information would be utilised to check bank accounts and child support grants (Key Informant 1). Money was also another challenge parents encountered. Parents said they were unable to afford to pay crèche fees (Key Informant 2). The child support grant was viewed by

parents as being too little and not enough to be used to pay crèche fees as the money would rather be allocated to buy food for the household (Key Informant 1). Another challenge was some parents lacked knowledge and understanding of why it is important to enrol their child in an ECD program. Laziness was cited as another challenge where parents opted not to make the effort to walk their children to crèche (Key Informant 3).

4.6 SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Social Development supported the ECD program at Bekezela Crèche through the child subsidy grant. This money was used towards the preparation of food for children who were enrolled at the crèche. This ensured that if there were children who were poor they were able to receive three nutritional meals a day (Key Informant 3). “We say to the teachers if you see a family that is poor go to that family and come back to the Department of Social Development and report the issue of the poor family, then maybe we can see what we can do maybe we can pay for the child’s uniform or lunch” (Key Informant 2). In areas where there were no ECD programs or crèches an alternative intervention was the development of the ECD mobile truck. The ECD mobile truck visits areas once a month carrying trained practitioners called *abahambi* who travelled on foot to those particular areas to educate children (Key Informant 1). These practitioners come to teach children in remote areas for 2 weeks in a month. This initiative was completely subsidized by the Department of Social Development and was free to parents. This was a new initiative which started in April 2017 at Mphise area ward 2 and Emathafeni area ward 5 in Maphumulo.

4.7 ACCESSIBILITY VARIATION IN ECD PROGRAMS

A key informant from Maphumulo noted in general that some parents in Maphumulo lacked knowledge about the value of ECD programs; they were thus unable to see the importance of enrolling their children in crèche (Key Informant 2). However in urban areas parents were seen as being more aware of ECD programs and the value they added to the development of their children (Key Informant 1). Money was another cause of variation in accessibility of ECD programs in rural areas. Parents often said that they were unable to pay crèche fees and decided that they would keep their children at home (Key Informant 2). Unemployment was a further challenge parents expressed as a hindrance to their ability to afford crèche fees. “In rural areas we are poorer than townships; for example, Maphumulo is different from Mandeni there are many employment opportunities so they are not dependent on the child support

grant” (Key Informant 3). In rural areas parents who were unemployed depended on the child support grant to buy food as this was their only source of income.

Children who were from high income earning households were able to access ECD programs. This occurred because they had parents who were able to pay for crèche fees as their parents were employed (Key Informant 1). However, children from low income earning households were unable to access ECD programs because their parents could not afford to pay crèche fees. The amount for crèche fees was completely determined by the non-profit organisation that provided the ECD program (Key Informant 3). Although the Department of Social Development does not determine crèche fees they suggest that infants pay more because they require more attention in comparison to children who are 3 to 4 years old (Key Informant 2).

4.8 SUBSIDIZATION OF ECD PROGRAMS

The Department of Social Development only funds community based organisations. These organisations needed to first register their non-profit organisation to receive a certificate (Key Informant 2). The ECD program will be registered and qualify for subsidization if they meet the norms and standards of funding. These consisted of a safe structure for children that had toilets as well as teachers who were trained as ECD practitioners (Key Informant 3). Children whose parents earned less than 1000 rand (per month) were subsidized; the subsidy was based on the child’s attendance (Key Informant 1). A child was subsidized 17 rand daily (Key Informant 1). The amount subsidized went into buying food for the crèche. In some cases, the subsidy money was used to buy stationary and maintaining of the crèche’s facility (Key Informant 2).

4.9 DEFINITION OF ECD PROGRAMS

ECD programs provided early learning, protection, care and nutritious meals (Key Informant 3). “ECD is broad we have ECD for 0-5 years that functions from 7am to 12pm known as a crèche and there are play groups and aftercare that functions after 12pm till 5pm” (Key Informant 1). The role of ECD programs was to ensure that the foundation phase of children was fully developed. The education children obtained from ECD programs enabled them to be well prepared for primary school as they were able to differentiate between colours and shapes (Key Informant 1). This ensured that children’s minds were developed. “Formal ECD

programs were centre based and have a curriculum that complies with the requirements of the Department. Informal ECD programs are non-centre based, like playgroups, they do not have a formal structure, today they can be in this place and tomorrow in another place” (Key Informant 2).

4.9.1 EDUCATING PARENTS ON ECD PROGRAMS

It was during parents’ meetings that the Department of Social Development would come to educate parents on ECD. The Department of Social Development interacted with parents and made presentations about ECD programs to parents during the parents and children picnic and concert. (Key Informant 1). There will be new parenting programs that will be put into place once the identified social workers have completed their training, these programs will target parents who have enrolled their children in an ECD program (Key Informant 2). The key informant felt that grandparents did not adequately understand ECD as a term (Key informant 3).

4.9.2 PARENTS’ PARTICIPATION IN ECD PROGRAMS

The participation of parents was incorporated into ECD programs through the governing body structure which consisted of parents, who actively participated in the decision making of how the crèche functioned (Key Informant 2). There were also days where parents were invited by the Department of Social Development to come and participate with their children on sports day, child parent picnics and concerts. Parenting programs were also suggested; it is believed that these programs would provide a platform of educating parents on why they should participate in ECD programs (Key Informant 1). There was a gap between parents and children participating together on ECD program activities. This was caused by the teachers of ECD centres who did not fully capacitate parents. For instance, as a result of a lack of capacity, some parents do not understand the importance of participating in sports days that occur in ECD centres (Key Informant 2). To encourage parent participation teachers were also tasked with giving children homework activities to be done with the help of their parents.

2.9.3 BENEFITS OF ECD PROGRAMS

One key informant mentioned that parents benefited from ECD programs by gaining knowledge on how to take care of their children which was provided by Department of Social

Development during the annual general meeting at the Bekezela Crèche (Key Informant 2). Children benefited from ECD programs by gaining knowledge and education which assisted them in being ready for primary school. Children were able to obtain writing skills, listening skills and discipline from ECD programs (Key Informant 2). This benefited parents who were working and did not have anyone to take care of their children while they were at work. ECD programs were able to provide three meals a day and taught children hygiene; they were also located in a place of care and safety (Key Informant 3).

4.10 GROUP A PARTICIPANTS: PARENTS WHOSE CHILDREN RECEIVE ECD SERVICES

4.10.1 PARENTS PERCEPTIONS OF ECD PROGRAMS

It is important to note that most of the parents interviewed were not familiar with the term ‘early childhood development program’, instead they understood the ECD programs as crèche level education. Crèche is a term used to describe ECD programs that are centre based.

One of the participants stated, “at crèche the child knows months of the year, shapes, colours, counting” (Participant1, Group A). Crèche was viewed by parents as places of early learning for their children. This is also emphasised by another participant who also viewed crèche as a place of learning, “when my child comes back from crèche I ask her to tell me what they learnt at crèche” (Participant 2, Group A). However there was a different perspective provided by other parents who viewed ECD programs as places of care and were not aware that these programs provide early learning to children.

“In my own understanding, I thought crèche was just about the teachers watching our children. I thought that children seriously learn when they are in grade 1, but now I can see that they are learning because now they can say nursery rhymes. I can see that learning is taking place because my child can count and say days of the week. There are many things children are learning at crèche” (Participant 5, Group A).

Parents understood crèche as a place where children learn because when they observed their children they saw a difference particular when they heard children saying what they learnt at crèche. Some parents went as far as suggesting that crèche made their children smarter. One

of the important attributes of enrolling a child in crèche was the speech development of the child. Parents saw progress in their children's speech and communication skills (Participant 1, Group A). This assisted parents as it enabled them to have a conversation with their children and the lines of communication were further expanded.

4.10.2 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PARENTS' DECISION IN ACCESSING ECD PROGRAMS

The decision as to which crèche parents would enrol their children in was predominantly influenced by the behaviour of the children who attended various crèches. The view was expressed by one participant who had a sister and her child was enrolled at Nyamazane Pre-school. The child was less talkative and less inquisitive in comparison to children who were enrolled at Bekezela Crèche. The participant saw them as open minded, alert and inquisitive (Participant, 9, Group A). Another parent began researching by asking parents who had children in grade 1 and which ECD centre was best to enrol a child in. The perception of Bekezela Crèche by parents was that the centre provided a quality ECD program. Parents noted that some children came from areas that were far away. For example, there were children who travelled from Vukile which was 4km away from Bekezela Crèche (Participant 7, Group A). In Vukile there was no crèche and parents choose to enrol their children at Bekezela Crèche. These parents also stated that teachers of the primary school across from the crèche indicated that children who were enrolled in the ECD program at Bekezela were well prepared for formal schooling (Participant 8, Group A).

Another parent chose the Bekezela ECD centre because it was close to where he stayed, was within walking distance for the child and the siblings had also been at this crèche in the past years (Participant 7, Group A). Parents also indicated that they chose this ECD centre because it was located close to the primary school and thus made it easier for the child to transition from crèche to formal school.

4.10.3 SKILLS OBTAINED FROM ECD PROGRAMS

The first skill that parents mentioned children learnt at crèche was writing. This was demonstrated in the words of a parent, "the child learns at the crèche because the child said mom at crèche they told me I should learn how to write my name" (Participant 3, Group A).

Another skill children learnt was to play with other children. This skill speaks to the psychosocial development of children where children learnt to interact with each other at crèche. “When I come to the crèche to check on how he is doing the teachers say the child enjoys playing very much and learning and particularly playing with toys found in the classroom” (Participant 2, Group A). Parents found that by sending their children to Bekezela Crèche they became more disciplined. Children were able to listen to teachers and they taught the children what is right and wrong. This greatly assisted parents as the teachers at crèche would reinforce discipline. Parents benefitted from this disciplinary exercise as it assisted in good behaviour of their children (Participant 5, Group A).

“This is what the child has learnt at crèche but before crèche the child would leave the toys outside when playing with them at home but now they know that once you have finished playing with the toys you pack them up and put them inside the house. The child is able to speak and say when they need to go to the toilet but before going to crèche the child’s speech was not yet fully developed. The child could not say when they needed to go to the toilet” (Participant 1, Group A).

This showed that parents were assisted by ECD programs as teachers were able to train children to learn to be autonomous by being able to use the toilet themselves. Another skill that children learnt in ECD programs was singing of nursery rhymes. Parents viewed this skill as important in educational development: “The child sings, counts 1, 2, 3 going forward. The child will be turning two years old soon but is able to sing, the child is very smart” (Participant 4, Group A).

Children learnt how to recognise letters of the alphabet of their first name and the names of members in the household. Parents found that crèche played an important role in educating children and stimulating their minds (Participant 6, Group A). Parents have become more aware about the types of activities that children were engaging in when at crèche. This has led to parents appreciating the role of ECD programs. “Children become more alert when they go to crèche unlike those children that stay at home. When my child comes home she sings and tells me what she learnt at crèche” (Participant 9, Group A). This showed that parents were now able to distinguish the difference between children who had been exposed to an ECD program and those who were not. Most parents agreed that ECD programs provided cognitive stimulation to their children.

4.10.4 INFORMAL ECD PROGRAMS

All parents indicated that they did not know anything about informal ECD programs, nor had they heard about them. “I have not heard of any ECD informal programs” (Participant 8, Group A).

4.10.5 NUMBER OF CRECHES AVAILABLE

As noted, the estimated number of crèches that are fully registered with Department of Social Development in Maphumulo is 29. These crèches were within the area of Maphumulo and they were located in the various wards found in the community. The common places cited by parents with regards to the location of these crèches were Okhalweni, Maqgibaqgiba, Oqaqeni, Emphumulo, Katshobho, Daninini and Maphumulo post office (Participant 1, Group A). Parents estimated the number of crèches they knew but were not able to say where they were located. “I know 3 crèches that are spread far apart from each other. This makes it difficult because the community is large” (Participant 5, Group A).

Parents were not aware of the exact or total number of ECD programs available in the community; instead gave estimates of how many they thought existed. Again, most of these parents did not know whether the ECD programs available in the community were registered by the Department of Social Development. The knowledge of the number and location of ECD programs available in the community was influenced by how long the participant had stayed in the area. Parents who have stayed in Maphumulo for years were able to estimate the number of ECD programs available as they had acquired the knowledge over time. “I know two crèches, Bekezela Crèche and the crèche in Maphumulo because I am new in the area” (Participant 2, Group A).

4.10.6 ACCESSING BEKEZELA CRECHE

Parents explained that some children walk to crèche because they live close to the crèche. “The child walks to crèche and is accompanied by my other child who goes to Nyamazane primary school. It only takes 5 minutes as we live close by” (Participant 5, Group A). However some parents hired public transport to take their children to crèche. This occurred because they lived a bit further from the crèche and therefore their children could not walk to the crèche. Some parents raised a concern that Bekezela Crèche was not easily accessible to all children that live in the Maphumulo area. There were parents who live close to

Ntsongantsonga Primary School where there was no crèche. Those parents had to pay for cars to transport their children to crèche (Participant 5, Group A).

4.11 WHAT DO ECD PROGRAMS PROVIDE?

Parents reported that Bekezela Crèche provided children with access to 3 meals per day which includes porridge, tea and bread in the morning and a cooked lunch at midday (Participant 1, Group A). This was viewed by parents as being important because even if a child came from a poor household they would have access to food. Parents from Group B also observed the same finding as Group A parents.

Knowledge was another attribute that children obtained from an ECD program according to parents. “They get knowledge when they go to crèche I see that because when the child comes back from crèche they are able to tell me what they learnt. Their mind becomes brighter because they have learnt a lot of things” (Participant 2, Group A). The knowledge that children obtained from Bekezela Crèche was the ability to identify colours in English and counting skills. Communication was another attribute raised by parents that children learnt to talk at crèche as they interacted with other children (Participant 10, Group A).

Parents also noted that Bekezela crèche provided access to toys for children to play with and activities that develop and educate the children. One of the parents observed that since their child was attending crèche they were dancing and singing (Participant 6, Group A). ECD programs also provided care to children; an incident occurred where one parent came to crèche and witnessed one of the teachers bathing a child (Participant 9, Group A).

4.11.1 TEACHING

Parents emphasised the role of ECD programs as one of teaching children. The teachers at ECD centre played an important role in teaching children how to be respectful and listen to their parents. Parents admitted that they struggled to teach their children to be respectful and found that when teachers taught the children they would listen at home (Participant 2, Group A). Parents believed that crèche makes a child more intelligent and that a child that has attended crèche hardly repeats grades at primary school level (Participant 4, Group A). Parents mentioned that they were unable to teach their children because they did not have time and thus crèche filled that gap (Participant 7, Group A).

4.11.2 PROTECTION

ECD programs also played a role in providing protection to children especially children whose parents work during the day. ECD programs become a place of care for children who did not have anyone to care for them during the day. The protection provided shielded children from any incidents of abuse (Participant 3, Group A). Parents also viewed Bekezela Crèche as a trust worthy place to leave their children in. One parent believed that crèche provided much better care than hiring a caregiver (Participant 3, Group A).

4.11.3 CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING ECD PROGRAMS

The general view of parents was that when a child has not been exposed to an ECD program before they start school they lag behind peers who have been exposed to an ECD program. This lead to children being labelled as slow learners but the issue was that they never went to crèche (Participant 10, Group A). The main complaint parents noted was the large number of children at Bekezela Creche and how they are squashed in one classroom. One of the parents comes to help clean the nearby church which was also used as a classroom because there was not enough space for all children (Participant 4, Group A). Various challenges to accessing ECD were raised by participants in Group A and it included cost, unemployment, transport, food access and time constraints.

COST

Money was one of the challenges parents mentioned as a barrier in accessing ECD programs. The concern was that many parents were unable to afford the monthly crèche fee at Bekezela (Participant 2, Group A). The monthly crèche fee was a R100. Parents' views regarding this cost were mixed. Some parents thought that the fee was expensive while other parents thought the fees were reasonable.

A parent responded by saying, "R100 is expensive in comparison to other crèches like Magqibagqiba which costs R35 per month. Even in this crèche it used to be R35 but it kept on increasing because they said other teachers could not be paid" (Participant 1, Group A). Magqibagqiba Crèche was cited by parents as not being expensive as the monthly fee was R35 but parents were unable to say why this crèche was particularly affordable. The number of children enrolled at Bekezela Crèche increased to 130. This meant that more teachers needed to be hired to teach the children but the challenge was that they were not remunerated

by government. They were paid salaries from the money parents paid monthly at the crèche (Participant 4, Group A). Parents stated that the reason that Bekezela Crèche was expensive was to enable the crèche teachers to earn a salary (Participant 3, Group A). The impact of the crèche fees resulted in some parents taking their children out of crèche to stay at home because they found the fee to be expensive.

The burden of paying crèche fees often fell on the grandmothers as caregivers (and recipients of the pension grant) who openly stated that sometimes the mother of the child does not provide crèche fees and the responsibility of paying the crèche fees fell to the caregiver (Participant 2, Group A). Another parent commented on the R100 crèche monthly fee as being reasonable because children were provided with 3 meals per day and teachers also needed to be paid a salary and that things were expensive (Participant 5, Group A).

UNEMPLOYMENT

Another challenge that arose was that some children live with grandparents and not parents. The grandparents had a challenge with paying the crèche fees because they were unemployed and did not have a stable income. “Money is the challenge, I think that makes parents not to send their children to crèche. The other grandparents are not working and others do not get the child support grants so crèche fees are expensive” (Participant 2, Group A). Unsurprisingly parents who found the crèche expensive were mostly unemployed and parents who found the crèche to be reasonable were employed. “Our husbands do not have stable jobs so we take the income they get from their jobs to pay crèche fees. Now you are unable to do other things freely” (Participant 3, Group A). These were the words of an unemployed participant who relies on her husband’s income to pay for the crèche fees. In some households there was no one who was employed and the child support grant became the only source of income for survival (Participant 6, Group A). Thus crèche fees to unemployed parents and grandparents were a burden that made accessing ECD programs difficult.

TRANSPORT

The cost of transport was a further challenge cited when accessing ECD particularly for parents who stayed far away from the Bekezela Crèche. The challenge was that parents would have to pay transport estimated at R160 fees plus crèche fees (R100) which made the cost of accessing ECD program expensive (Participant 2, Group A). “Parents that live far from crèche may have difficulty as they would have to pay for transport and crèche money

monthly” (Participant 10, Group A). The impact of transport fees and crèche fees meant that for parents who could not afford to pay, their children would not access an ECD program even though the child was eligible to be in crèche (Participant 9, Group A).

FOOD

A number of parents indicated that the child support grant was the main income they received which was used to buy groceries. “Some parents have three children that take public transport which means its 150x3 plus 300 for crèche fees. So now it becomes difficult because most of the money is going towards paying crèche, what will the family eat at home” (Participant 7, Group A). The child support grant was not only used to buy food but to buy clothes for the child as well. Parents found it very difficult to afford crèche, transport fees and still be able to buy food for the household out of the child support grant (Participant 7, Group A). It was these factors that made some parents decide to take their children out of crèche. “Some parents survive off the child support grant so when they pay this R100 the money left becomes little to use towards groceries” (Participant 9, Group A).

TIME

Parents emphasised the issue of time at Bekezela Crèche. The time the crèche closes was at 1pm but the challenge was that parents who were working were unable to come and collect their children in the middle of the day. Parents who work struggled such as a nurse who was interviewed. She works from 6am to 6pm and Bekezela Crèche opens at 7:30am and closes at 1pm (Participant 7, Group A). This resulted in parents having to enrol their children in a crèche closer to work.

4.12 INTERVENTIONS TO CHALLENGES

When asked how ECD could be made more accessible parents argued that government needs to assist in paying the teachers at Bekezela Crèche so that the fees could be reduced (Participant 1, Group A). Other parents requested support from the government to build new classrooms to accommodate the large number of children. The assistance of government was also mentioned particularly for parents who live far away from Bekezela Crèche to build crèche near where they stay (Participant 3, Group A). This was a suggested solution so as to cut transport fees because children could walk to crèche. Government could also intervene by helping in paying transport fees for those children who stay in areas with no crèche and have

to travel every day (Participant 5, Group A). There was also a suggestion for the Department of Social Development to assist in standardising the quality of ECD programs in all crèches. One of the parents suggested that the Department of Social Development should look at why Bekezela Crèche has a good quality ECD program and assist other crèches to reach the same level (Participant 8, Group A). Parents also suggested that Bekezela Crèche offer an after care for children whose parents are working as well as providing facilities for children younger than two years old (Participant 7, Group A).

4.13 PARENT PARTICIPATION IN ECD PROGRAMS

One of the parents said that she does not participate in any crèche activities because she is a caregiver for her sister's child (Participant 10, Group A). Mostly, parents' participation in the ECD program comprised of attending the parents' meetings. The meetings were conducted during the week however, working parents were excluded because of work commitment. The involvement of some parents' was therefore minimal: "Sometimes at home I help revise with my child what they have learnt at crèche and some days I don't because of work. My work is challenging because it happens that I get phoned in the night and I have to go and work" (Participant 8, Group A).

Parents' participation in the ECD program was mostly through parent and child interactions. These occurred at home where a parent would ask a child what they learnt at crèche and assist with the homework activity (Participant 9, Group A). Parents also participated in the ECD program by paying the crèche fees and ensuring that they adhere to crèche policy regarding collecting children inside the crèche facility for safety reasons (Participant 7, Group A). Homework activities included reading the alphabet together with the child, correcting the mispronunciation of words and writing. Parent and child interactions extend as far as parents teaching their child how to use the toilet, to say thank you and not to play roughly with other children (Participant 4, Group A). Parent and teacher interactions were also one of the ways parents participated in ECD programs. Parents would talk to the teachers regarding the performance of their children, ask if there were any problems and seek possible solutions (Participant 1, Group A).

4.13.1 CAUSES OF POOR PARENT PARTICIPATION

Some parents do not have time to participate in the ECD program and this was highlighted as the main reason for low levels of participation: “Some parents do not give attention to the child and what the child is doing at crèche. When they send their child to crèche, they do not ask the child what the child did at school” (Participant 2, Group A). Some parents did not have time because they were working. Another issue raised was that some parents because of work do not live with their children. The children are left in the care of grandparents who are often not literate and unable to assist with homework activities (Participant 6, Group A). Poor communication between teachers and parents was one of the factors that caused poor parent participation (Participant 5, Group A). Some parents did not engage in activities that are taking place at crèche because they perceive crèche as predominantly a day care facility (Participant 5, Group A). Others did not engage because they trust the crèche to take good care of their child and know that if there is something wrong the child will inform them (Participant 7, Group A).

4.13.2 ROLE OF PARENTS IN ECD PROGRAMS

The role of parents in ECD programs was to ask the child what they learnt at crèche and to add additional knowledge that is within the comprehension of a child. One parent stated, “as parents we need to motivate each other to take care of our children and make sure they go to crèche so the children can get knowledge” (Participant 2, Group A). Parents raised the importance of working together with the teachers to help children learn and become intelligent. As part of taking care of children, parents should create a bond with their children so as to be able to easily identify any problems the child is having (Participant 5, Group A). One parent strongly believed that there needs to be government intervention to reinforce the role of parents in ECD programs. “It is difficult unless Department of Social Development could expose parents to more information on early childhood development” (Participant 8, Group A). Activities parents emphasised they could do with their children was to help them with writing, listening to what the children were saying and correcting them where they are wrong.

4.14 BENEFITS OF ECD PROGRAMS

A lot of parents affirm that one major benefit of ECD programs is that it helps to grow and develop the mind of a child. As the child gets taught by teachers, they were now able to take

instructions, talk, write, read and develop listening skills (Participant 8, Group A). ECD programs also provide a place of care and safety for children, assisting parents who do not have anyone at home to undertake childcare. This helped decrease children being exposed to rape and wandering on the streets because they stay inside the crèche facility which is fenced (Participant 1, Group A). These programs provided children an opportunity to play with other children in a supervised environment which prevented them from being injured playing at home (Participant 7, Group A). Parents also found that when they sent their children to an ECD program they had free time to engage in activities like completing domestic chores, being able to attend church services during the week and going to town (Participant 4, Group A).

4.15 GROUP B PARTICIPANTS: PARENTS WHO HAVE CHILDREN THAT DO NOT RECEIVE ECD SERVICES

4.15.1 PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF ECD PROGRAMS

Grandparents indicated that they did not know anything about ECD programs but shared what they had observed about crèche. Crèche was viewed as developing the minds of children, teaching them how to count, sing nursery rhymes, say months of the year in isiZulu and most importantly skilled in manners and respect for elders (Participant 20, Group B). Parents observed that children who were enrolled at crèche learnt to play with other children. “Unlike children who do not go to crèche they do not know how to play with other children and often hit children but at crèche they are taught not to hit other children” (Participant 13, Group B). Crèche also taught children how to be clean and remain safe from danger (Participant 16, Group B). “A child that stays at home will play near the fire and eat sand but a child that goes to crèche will not play with the fire because they know they will become dirty and they know not to eat sand” (Participant 11, Group B).

Parents and caregivers it seems were able to distinguish the difference between a child that has been exposed to crèche and one that did not go to crèche. According to a grandparent's observation, “the children are really smart because the teachers teach children about animals that crawl on the ground. By the time the children leave the crèche to begin formal schooling they are well prepared” (Participant 1, Group B). “A child that has been enrolled at crèche is not the same as a child that has not been at crèche. A child that goes to crèche is able to count from 1 to 10” (Participant 11, Group B). A child that has not been enrolled at crèche does not

know the days of the week (Participant 14, Group B). “Children who go to crèche learn to listen when the teachers are teaching them, but my granddaughter when we try to teach her things she does not listen and gets angry” (Participant 14, Group B). Parents observed that while their children stayed at home and did not go to crèche their minds were not being stimulated, they were not learning at home (Participant 14, Group B).

4.15.2 INFORMAL ECD PROGRAMS

All parents stated that they did not have any knowledge about informal ECD programs, they had never heard of such a term. One of the grandparents went on to say they would be interested in such a program as they would love the opportunity for their grandchildren to be part of a play group (Participant 11, Group B). However she stated, “The problem though is that I would not be able to accompany my grandchild to a play group because I have to sell my food” (Participant 11, Group B). The grandmother stated that if there could be a car that would take her grandchild to play group and bring her back she would be willing to pay.

4.16 WHY PARENTS’ CHOOSE NOT TO ENROL THEIR CHILDREN IN CRECHE

One of the reasons parents mentioned for not enrolling their children into an ECD program was the age of the child. One parent said that their child was 1 year and 6 months old, the child was still using a diaper (Participant 11, Group B). Bekezela Crèche does not have enough facilities to take care of children from birth hence they admit children who are 3 years and above (Participant 20, Group B). According to a parent, “what I know is that they want a child that is able to say when they need to go to the toilet my child is still using a diaper and has not fully developed the ability to talk clearly” (Participant 11, Group B).

Unemployed parents viewed the fees at Bekezela Crèche expensive; this resulted in parents choosing not to enrol their children at crèche. A parent stated that, “I cannot afford to pay the R100 every month at crèche. I also cannot afford to buy clothes for my child to wear at crèche every day. My child used to go to crèche but I took him out of crèche because I was struggling to pay the monthly fee” (Participant 12, Group B). A parent explained that they chose not to enrol their child into crèche because they were unemployed and were able to take care of their child at home (Participant 13, Group B). Parents saw themselves as poor and not having enough money to buy food for the household and also be able to pay crèche

fee (Participant 15, Group B). According to a parent, “the grant money is used to buy food in the house” (Participant 17, Group B).

4.16 CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

Most respondents’ childcare arrangements were based on family household members who were unemployed and therefore available to take care of children who were not enrolled in an ECD program. An example was a grandparent who was staying with three grandchildren who were taken care of by her sister during the day because she was selling snacks (Participant 11, Group B). Unemployed parents looked after their own children but received support from other family members who were available (Participant 12, Group B). “Whenever I have to go to Stanger on a weekend, I leave my child with her older sister and brother” (Participant 13, Group B). The care arrangement depended particularly on family members especially when parents needed to go to town or go to hospital. The care arrangements were predominantly the responsibility of grandparents who were often left with grandchildren (Participant 17, Group B).

4.17 CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING ECD PROGRAMS

COST AND TRANSPORT

Crèche fees were found to be expensive by most parents because they were unable to afford the R100 monthly fee paid at Bekezela Crèche. Parents thought the reason the crèche fees were expensive was caused by the following factors: teacher’s salary, buying of crèche food and stationary (Participant 19, Group B). “It is expensive because my children do not work and the money I get for pension is little. The teachers did explain that they earn an income from the money parents paid” (Participant 16, Group B). While there were many parents that said the R100 was expensive, other parents had a different opinion. They thought that the crèche fee was not expensive because the child was taken care of at the crèche.

One of the parents went on to explain that crèche fee was cheap because hiring a child care giver was much more expensive; the estimated cost was R1000 a month (Participant 13, Group B). Some parents did not know of any cheaper crèches while other parents mentioned two crèches, Magqibagqiba and Maphumulo, by the post office. Both of these crèches were far from where parents stayed and would require a car to transport the children (Participant 14, Group B). Transportation was an additional cost plus crèche fees, parents found that it

would end up being more expensive. “the crèche at Maphumulo is not expensive because it cost R35 monthly. So even if the crèche is cheaper I would have to pay transport costs of R120 which ends up over all being more expensive then Bekezela” (Participant 15, Group B).

Children who come from poor households struggle to get access to ECD programs. One of the reasons provided by a grandparent was, “the child support grant is small and out of the grant the child needs food, nappies, clothes, soap but the mother uses the money to buy food because she is unemployed” (Participant 11, Group B). The grandmother thought that the R100 could be used to buy food like maize meal which will sustain the household but would result in the parent being unable to pay crèche fees. Parents were unable to afford crèche fees because they were unemployed and were poor (Participant 15, Group B).

4.18 INTERVENTIONS TO CHALLENGES

Parents in Group B suggested ways to increase their access to ECD services. A parent for example suggested that children who were able to go to the toilet should pay lower crèche fees (Participant 16, Group B). Government intervention was one of the solutions raised by parents in creating crèche for children 4 years and younger that will be free and providing employment opportunities in Maphumulo. “I think that even at crèche if children could wear a uniform so that you can’t tell whether a child is poor or not” (Participant 14, Group B). If a parent had more than one child at crèche they could pay half price (Participant 13, Group B).

4.19 FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

4.19.1 DEFINITION OF ECD PROGRAMS

“Early childhood development means capacitating the mind of the child to be able to see and identify various shapes, colours. Also teaching a child to learn to talk in a classroom” (Participant 24, Focus Group1). The teachers of Bekezela Crèche understood ECD programs as providing early learning and stimulating a child’s mind. They received this knowledge at the training workshop they had attended which was facilitated by the Department of Social Development in Maphumulo. As the mind of a child was developed they become more alert, curious, and smart (Participant, 22, Focus Group 1). Early learning became the training ground for memory development of children as they were taught step by step by teachers

according to their age group. One participant stated that “a child that goes to crèche always asks a lot of questions, their minds are sharper” (Participant 22, Focus Group 1).

Teachers from Bekezela Crèche indicated that they had not yet taught parents about ECD programs but during parents’ meetings, parents were able to see the work done by their children (Participant 21, Focus Group 1). Teachers encouraged parents to interact with their children by asking them what they learnt at crèche. One participant explained what they understood about ECD programs, “The term early childhood development means that children should be educated because parents send their children to crèche to be educated. “They learnt respect, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable” (Participant 27, Focus Group 2). All participants from the focus group discussions indicated that they did not have knowledge of informal ECD programs.

4.19.2 CRECHE MONTHLY FEES

The crèche monthly fee was used to buy toys, study materials for children, disinfectant soap, cleaning materials, electricity, mattresses children sleep on, salaries for teachers and pay the lady who cooks (Participant 21, Focus Group 1). Some parents were able to pay the crèche fee of R100 while other parents were unable to pay. “During parents’ meetings, parents agreed that they will pay the R100 crèche fee; but when it was time for them to pay some parents did not pay the crèche fee” (Participant 23, Focus Group 1). One of the participants stated that, “parents do get the child support grant but use it on buying food for the family and forget that the grant is supposed to focus on the needs of a child like paying for crèche” (Participant 22, Focus Group 1).

However in rural areas poverty was the main problem, the child support grant for some households was the only source of income which was used to buy food. “Some parents are stubborn to pay because they hear other parents saying I enrolled my child here at crèche and the child did not pay and now they have progressed to Nyamazane Primary School” (Participant 25, Focus Group 2). The crèche struggled to get young parents to pay crèche fees, the parents simply said that the child support grant was small and therefore would not be used to pay crèche fees (Participant 27, Focus Group 2).

Another challenge was that some parents believed that education was free thus they did not pay crèche fees. All the teachers saw the crèche fee as not being expensive because the

amount was determined by the parents themselves (Participant 26, Focus Group 2). Teachers would call a parent-teacher meeting to discuss crèche fees with the parents and the crèche governing body and the decision of crèche fees would be made by parents. According to the crèche manager, “other parents do not pay on purpose because they are being difficult and I cannot chase the child away from crèche” (Participant 21, Focus Group1). The Department of Social Development does not permit any child to be taken out of crèche by the crèche manager because they have not paid crèche fees (Participant 21, Focus Group1).

4.19.3 CHALLENGES TEACHERS AT BEKEZELA CRECHE EXPERIENCE

Teachers noted the following challenges: some parents when they were enrolling their children at Bekezela Crèche did not submit the required documents. For example, a child’s birth certificate, immunisation card and parent’s identity document were not presented (Participant 21, Focus Group). “When a parent asks if they can enrol their child at Bekezela, I request the following documents: birth certificate, immunization card of the child and parent’s identity document. The parents promised they will bring the documents the next day but they ended up not providing the documents” (Participant 21, Focus Group 1). A social worker had previously advised the teachers at crèche not to accept any child without all documentation. “Admission of children at Bekezela crèche is a problem because some parents comply with the norm and standards but other parents do not comply” (Participant 21, Focus Group 1). There were some parents who struggled to provide the required documents because their children were born at home and therefore did not have a birth certificate, other children have never been to a clinic, and they therefore do not have an immunisation card (Participant 23, Focus Group 1).

4.19.4 RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT POOR CHILDREN

Teachers at Bekezela Crèche suggested that parents who were unable to afford crèche fees seek financial assistance from the elected community counsellor also known as Induna (Participant 25, Focus Group 2). The government could also intervene by assisting parents who did not have birth certificates and immunisation cards to have access to these documents. Teachers also stated that government needed to make parents more aware of the importance of crèche (Participant 23, Focus Group 1).

4.20 PARENTS' PARTICIPATION IN ECD PROGRAMS

Parents' participation in ECD programs was estimated to range from 40% to 45% (Participant 23, Focus Group 1). One teacher stated this about some parents, "they do not want to participate, to come and see what their children are doing" (Participant 21, Focus Group 1). Some parents participated but most parents did not participate in crèche activities like parent meetings, sports day and any event taking place at crèche. Teachers argued that they made efforts to include parents by informing parents of activities taking place but participation was poor. One of the reasons for poor parent participation was because some parents were working and could not attend events (Participant 22, Focus Group 2). In other cases, parents do not live with their children, the children stay with grandparents. Teachers also argued that some parents are simply lazy (Participant 25, Focus Group 2).

According to some teachers, parents could potentially play a role in assisting with cleaning and gardening because the crèche was unable to afford to pay more staff members. They could also play a role in ECD programs by assisting teachers in taking care of children (Participant 21, Focus Group 1). Teachers at the Bekezela Crèche encouraged parent participation by giving children homework activities to complete with their parents. Children that lived with their grandparents were given the task of asking their grandparents to tell them a story (Participant 24, Focus Group 1).

4.21 BENEFITS OF ECD PROGRAMS

Teachers at Bekezela Crèche stated that parents were supported by ECD programs as they provided safe care for their children. Events like sports day and going to the beach taught children how to play and should a child become injured at crèche the child was taken immediately to the clinic (Participant 25, Focus Group 2). Social workers enter each household and educate parents about ECD in an attempt to decrease child abuse. "As a teacher at the crèche I teach children not to allow their uncles, brother and grandfathers to touch their private parts" (Participant 21, Focus Group 1).

Children importantly benefited from ECD programs through obtaining knowledge and were well prepared for grade R (Participant 21, Focus Group 1). Working parents particularly benefited as they were able to discover what their child excels in at crèche. ECD programs taught children religious songs and developed their minds (Participant 25, Focus Group 2).

ECD programs also aid in potty training children (Participant 24, Focus Group 1). “As children attend crèche they learn that you go to school to learn; teachers educate children on how to do classroom activities and play with other children” (Participant 27, Focus Group 2). The three meals provided at Bekezela crèche enabled children to have access to food, and this assisted children who came from low-income earning households that experienced food insecurity (Participant 30, Focus Group 2).

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter will discuss the results obtained from the 2 focus group discussions and the 23 interviews with parents and key informants in Maphumulo. The ecological systems theory of human development will be used in the analysis. This chapter will consider the following research questions:

- What do parents expect from early childhood development programs?
- What role do parents play in these programs?
- How accessible are early childhood development programs to poor children?
- What are the benefits of these programs?

5.2 WHAT DO PARENTS EXPECT FROM ECD PROGRAMS?

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ECD PROGRAMS

This study found that caregivers included parents and grandparents. This is because biological mothers were explained to have migrated to nearby towns in search of employment. This context was also the case in a study done in 2014 in the Eastern Cape in Mdantsane District which looked at parental perceptions of ECD provisioning (Shumba et al, 2014). All parents interviewed were unfamiliar with the term ECD; many stated that they had not heard this term before. This showed that parents had limited knowledge on ECD. Instead parents understood ECD programs as crèche.

A term which was often used to describe centre based ECD program was crèche. The limited knowledge some parents had on ECD programs particularly in Maphumulo showed that there was still a gap in understanding ECD and that parents needed to be further educated. The informed parents were able to provide more insight on what crèche activities their children were doing. Grandparents mentioned that they had little knowledge on ECD programs and attributed this to their not literacy. However this finding were also consistent with a study conducted in the Western Cape (Bellville) which looked at the relationship between having knowledge on child development and styles of parents. The study found that the more educated a parent was, the more knowledge they had about child development (September, et al, 2016).

Parents who sent their children to crèche observed a change in the behaviour of their children. They saw the minds of their children being developed and attributed this to the learning taking place at crèche. Parents saw an improvement in the speech development of their children who were enrolled at the Bekezela Crèche. Speech development was improved by teacher-child interactions as well as the interaction children had with their peers in the classroom. ECD programs have been shown to provide rich language development which has a positive impact on the interactions parents have with their children (Pitt et al, 2013). In this study parents reported that they were able to have conversations with their children because their speech was clear and this was attributed to crèche attendance.

Parents who had not enrolled their children to crèche did not have knowledge of ECD as a term but observed children who went to crèche. Through their observations they recognised that children who were enrolled at crèche could count, sing, knew months of the year, and could identify shapes and colours. When the parents compared this observation against their children who were not enrolled in an ECD program they found that their children did not know how to count and differentiate between colours. This showed that children who were not enrolled at crèche were not getting sufficient cognitive stimulation which is one of the focuses of ECD programs (Department of Education White Paper, 2001). One parent mentioned that they would try to teach their child to count at home but the child would become angry and not listen.

All parents indicated that they did not know anything about informal ECD programs. According to one of the key informants interviewed there were currently no informal ECD programs such as play groups in Maphumulo. This was a concern because it meant that children who cannot access centre based ECD programs did not have an alternative option. Informal ECD programs like play groups are also part of the integrated approach to ECD provisioning, which aims to increase accessibility of ECD programs particularly to vulnerable children who come from poverty stricken backgrounds (Biersteker, 2011). The Department of Social Development can look at implementing informal ECD programs in Maphumulo educating parents on these programs. Informal ECD programs could also assist parents who are unable to afford crèche fees.

ROLE OF ECD PROGRAMS

Parents mentioned that one of the key roles of ECD programs was the three meals provided such as at the one at the Bekezela Crèche. Parents viewed this as beneficial because even if a child was from a poor family where the household did not have enough food, the child had access to food at crèche. The Department of Social Development provides a subsidization of R17 daily for the attendance of the child at crèche (Department of Social Development, 2012). This subsidy has assisted registered community based centres to buy food which would be prepared for children at the crèche. This has been one of the interventions that the Department of Social Development has put in place to try and reduce food insecurity experienced by low-income earning households. This intervention however can only be accessed by a fully registered ECD program like the Bekezela Crèche. ECD centres that are still trying to meet the norms and standards of the Department of Social Development do not have access to the child subsidy. This means that those ECD centres cannot provide food to children, which leaves children from poor households exposed to hunger. Atmore et al state that, “hunger is highest among black African children with 17% of the total black African child population living in households that reported child hunger compared to 13% of coloured children, 2% Indian and only 1% of white children” (2012: 124). Child hunger can have negative impact on a child’s development as it exposes the child to the risk of being malnourished. This consequently impacts cognitive development and can lead to poor performance in school and also increases chances of grade repetition (Biersteker, 2011).

Teachers played an important role at crèche as they taught children how to be respectful and to listen. However parents mentioned that they struggled to get their children to listen to them at home. This shows a need to further capacitate parents through parenting programs on child-parent interactions and responsive parenting. This is particularly important because the parent is the primary care giver of the child (Department of Social Development, 2012). The assistance teachers provided to parents in this respect in the Bekezela ECD program had a positive impact in achieving socio-emotional development which is one of the requirements of ECD programs.

The Bekezela ECD program provided children with access to toys and also taught children to play with their peers. This was particularly viewed by parents as valuable. Psychosocial development provided by ECD programs are in line with the National Integrated Plan which incorporates psychosocial development as an integral part of a child’s development

milestones (September et al, 2016). At Bekezela the access to toys assisted parents who did not have the financial resources to purchase toys for their children to play with at home. The psychosocial development benefited parents whose children were enrolled to an ECD program. Parents whose children were at home were not exposed to such psychosocial development. Children who have not been exposed to an ECD program could possibly lag behind their peers in performance or classroom activities (Currie, 2001).

5.3 ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The ecological systems theory will be used in this discussion. The theory is suitable for this study because it places child development within the context of the environment the child is situated in. The theory emphasises that the interactions and relationships that occur within the systems affect the development of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). This theory is particularly relevant to the study and will be used to examine (1) parents' participation in ECD programs, (2) challenges in accessing ECD programs and (3) possible benefits of these programs. Parents are the primary caregivers to their children thus their participation and their challenges directly and indirectly affect the development of the child. However this study will consider the positive and negative impacts of structures found within the ecological systems to analyse how they affect the development of the child. This study will look at the following ecological systems: Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem and Macrosystem.

5.4 WHAT ROLE DO PARENTS PLAY IN ECD PROGRAMS?

Parents' involvement in the education of their children has positive impacts on early childhood development (Shumba et al, 2014). Parent participation is incorporated in the initial design of ECD program at Bekezela Crèche through the formation of the governing body which consists of parents. The role of the governing body is to actively participate in crèche activities working together with the teachers. The governing body participates in the decision making process at Bekezela Crèche. The key areas of parent participation are parenting, communication to and from school, volunteering, learning activities at home, decision-making and collaboration with the community (Shumba et al, 2014:462).

In the case of Bekezela Crèche parents viewed their role as participating in ECD programs through engaging with their children during homework activities. This entailed asking their

children what they learnt and working together with the teachers to ensure that optimal early learning stimulation took place. These interactions would occur in the mesosystem which consists of linkages and processes occurring between two or more settings where parents and teachers interact with each other. This would have a positive impact on the microsystem which consists of the child. The interactions could also result in parents being more responsive and nurturing towards their children (Pitt et al, 2013). One of the examples a parent gave as a way they participate in the ECD program was to revise with the child what the child learnt at crèche and assist the child with homework activities. This was a good example of a responsive parent, where the parent has interactions with the child at home. These interactions are part of the microsystem as parents directly interact with the child (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). This is beneficial as it enhances development of the child (Atmore et al, 2012). Although some parents did participate in the ECD program by assisting their children with reading the alphabets and writing their names, parents' participation was mainly home based. There is still a gap in active parent participation which consists of parenting skills, communication with teachers from crèche. It is in these areas that parents still need to actively engage in.

CAUSES OF POOR PARENT PARTICIPATION

Bekezela parents mainly participated in the ECD program through attending parent-teacher meetings at Bekezela Crèche and paying crèche fees. These meetings were held during the week which excluded a number of parents who were working. This meant that employed parents had poor communication with teachers at the crèche (Pitt et al, 2013). This affects parent-teacher relations which are an important structure within the mesosystem. The exosystem does not have direct interactions with the child, but influences the child indirectly through events occurring in its context; parent working patterns for example. Parents who were working reported that they were unable to attend parent-teacher meetings as they were scheduled during the week while they were at work. This shows that employed parents were unable to actively participate in ECD programs and establish good communication with the crèche teachers.

This above states situation affected the parent-child interactions found in the microsystem as parents were unable to participate in home based activities. The variation in parents' participation in ECD programs is of great concern as it could have potential harmful effects on the child's development. Through parent-child interactions a child develops emotionally

and socially. When parent-child interactions are not well established this could lead to an imbalance in the socio-emotional development of the child (Department of Social Development, 2012). This could cause a child to have behavioural problems. Another example of the working patterns found in the exosystem was when some parents mentioned that they did not have time to participate in activities occurring at the Bekezela Crèche because they were working. However, this is not one of best parenting practices as it often leads to neglect of the child. This is in contrast to good parenting practices which include spending quality time, being responsive and nurturing the child (September et al, 2016). Some parents also mentioned that they did not participate in crèche activities because they were looking after younger children at home. This could mean that some parents experienced stress when they have to care for more than one child particularly younger children. Studies have shown that children below the age of two are mostly cared for at home or by a caregiver (Biersteker, 2011). A stressed parent may be unable to provide the nurturing environment needed to enhance the development of the child enrolled at a crèche. Instead parents end up having poor child-parent interactions which are crucial to the development of a child in the microsystem as it is in contact with the child directly.

The effects of low levels of parent participation include poor performance in class room activities by the child and less than optimal parenting. Poor parenting can place a child's development at risk as the child may develop behavioural problems (Department of Social Development, 2012). Another cause of poor parent participation was that some parents did not stay close to their children. Their children were cared for by grandparents who were not literate. Illiteracy could be a barrier preventing grandparents from participating actively in the content of home-work activities. Parent participation is thus important in creating harmony between child rearing practices and an educational approach at home and at the ECD centre (Shumba et al, 2014). This is important as parents and teachers need to interact with each other to share any knowledge they have on child development. The exosystem encompasses processes that indirectly affect the development of the child; a case in point is the relationship at home and parents' workplace. What occurs in a parent's work place does not directly interact with the child however some parents who were working were unable to create early learning stimulating environments at home because they did not have the time.

5.5 HOW ACCESSIBLE ARE ECD PROGRAMS TO POOR CHILDREN?

WHY PARENTS STRUGGLED TO ACCESS ECD PROGRAMS

The macrosystem is the outermost layer in a child's environment that does not affect the child directly but indirectly (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). This layer consists of structures that look at opportunity structures, hazards and options as well as cultural values, customs and laws. Unemployed parents in the study were unable to afford crèche fees. The child support grant was the only source of income for unemployed parents and this could not cover all the costs needed for a child. These costs included clothes, food and the Bekezela Crèche fees. In contrast, parents who were employed found the crèche fees affordable. The child support grant was mainly used to buy food that would be consumed by the whole family. Although the child support grant was intended to fulfil the needs of a child in poor families; in the study, the child support grant was used to sustain the whole family in an attempt to protect the household from food insecurity. Unemployment is one of the characteristics of the macrosystem because this system looks at broader contexts. While food insecurity is a broad challenge, rural areas are more affected due to poverty and unemployment (Atmore et al, 2012).

Unemployment was one of the challenges the study participants (especially parents) experienced which resulted in their poor socioeconomic status. The unemployment rate in Maphumulo was 49% in year 2011 (Maphumulo IDP review, 2014). This occurred because the child support grant for unemployed parents became the only source of income to sustain the livelihood of the entire household. In essence, income poverty is one of the barriers poor households experienced which affect a child's accessibility to ECD program (Biersteker, 2011). A child's development is affected by what happens in the macrosystem. For example, the socioeconomic status of a parent was found to have an impact on whether a child could access an ECD program or not. Children from poor households live in resource constrained environments which hinders their developmental milestones as they often lag behind peers whose parents are able to afford crèche fees. This situation has also created a challenge of variation in accessibility of ECD programs where children from poor households are unable to access these programs (Pitt et al, 2013).

The above stated challenge existed with both groups of parents interviewed. However, in Group A some of the parents were unemployed but had one household member who was employed whose income was used to pay ECD centre fees. In Group B, the difference was

that all household members were unemployed thus they depended on the child support grant for their survival. Parents who did not have sufficient resources were unable to provide stimulating early learning environments for their children as they could not afford to pay ECD centre fees. Further, parents who stay in areas that are further away from the Bekezela Crèche experienced challenges with transportation cost. The transportation costs plus the ECD centre fees become an expensive and unfordable cost for households living in poverty. And this consequently makes them unable to afford enrolling their child at the Bekezela Crèche.

5.6 WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THESE PROGRAMS?

The microsystem is the closest to the child and consists of structures which are in direct contact with the child (Berk, 2000). The microsystem contains relationships and interactions a child has with his/her immediate surroundings (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). The microsystem contains structures that the child interacts with including family, school, neighbourhood and the childcare environment. One of the benefits highlighted by parents was the protection and the care the ECD centres provided. Parents viewed Bekezela Crèche as being a place of safety for their children, where children can be protected from rape and possible injuries that would occur when children are without proper supervision. This also supports the goal of the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development which was to ensure that ECD centres are a place of safety and care for children (National Integrated Plan, 2005).

Another benefit was the three meals provided at the Bekezela Creche which ensured that all children had access to food even if there was no food at home. This showed that some parents lack resources to be able to buy food thus some children experience hunger in their families. These finding were consistent with the study conducted in Mdansane in the Eastern Cape where parents reported that they sent their children to crèche so as to obtain food (Shumbe et al, 2014). Although this benefit is situated in the microsystem as children were directly provided with food this was influenced by the child subsidy provided by the Department of Social Development to registered community based crèches; this structure is situated in the macrosystem. This is an important factor to note that all ecological systems are related and interact with each other as well as the structures within them (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

ECD programs benefited children through the provision of early learning stimulation particularly children who were from low socioeconomic households (Biersteker, 2011).

Children who were enrolled at Bekezela Crèche obtained skills such as writing, reading which improved language development. In the microsystem teacher-child interactions became the vehicle which promoted cognitive stimulation of children. Children were able to share the knowledge they obtained from crèche to their parents. This meant that the teacher-child interactions had a positive effect on parent-child interactions. It is important to note that the interactions a child has with the ecological system are bidirectional. In this way ecological systems influence the development of a child but a child also influences the structures within the system (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). An example is knowledge transfer when Bekezela children were taught by teachers at crèche they were able to transfer that knowledge to their grandparents who were not literate. This enabled grandparents to understand crèche activities which influenced their perception of ECD centres as being places where children learn. In addition to this, children were able to transform their behaviour at home based on what they learned at crèche – this was in reference to manners and toilet habits for example.

The benefits of ECD programs to parents included parenting skills that affect child rearing practices. These benefits included educating parents on the importance of interacting with their children; for example talking to their children and asking them what they learnt at crèche. This also included teaching children to respect adults in the community of Maphumulo. The parenting skills also taught parents how to transfer social skills. For example parents were encouraged to teach their children to greet people and ask for help. These social skills enabled children to interact effectively with their peers and learn self-control (Department of Social Development, 2012). Once a year, the Department of Social Development holds an annual general meeting with parents and teachers of Bekezela crèche to capacitate them on parenting skills. The benefit of sharing this knowledge also interacts with the microsystem as parents would be equipped to know how to improve their parent-child interactions which positively impact the development of the child. Access to material resources is also another characteristic of the macrosystem. Parents who were employed in this study stated that they found the Bekezela Crèche fees affordable. This was possible because they had money; an example of material resources which was used to pay for crèche fees. The parents who did not have access to ECD services stated their unemployment and poverty was the reason they could not enrol their children at crèche. This example shows that parents who lack material resources were unable to provide early learning opportunities for their children.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The Bekezela case study showed that parents interviewed were not familiar with the idea of ECD but rather saw crèche as a place of care and protection for their children. Bekezela Crèche was viewed by parents as a place where children learn and obtain essential skills. These skills consisted of reading, writing, colour differentiation and counting. Parents understood that crèche played an important role in teaching their children by providing early learning and stimulating the cognitive development of the child. Crèche further provided food to children which assisted households that often experienced food insecurity.

Although some study parents participated in ECD programs, parent participation remained focused on home activities. There is still a need for the Department of Social Development to assist parents to understand the importance of parent participation in ECD programs. This can be achieved through having more parenting programs. However, these programs need to be conducted in such a way that even illiterate grandparents are able to understand. ECD centres can also play an important role by having parent-teacher meetings on a weekend so as to accommodate working parents. Since ECD centres interact with parents directly they could also facilitate workshops where they share with parents how they can help their children with home activities and educate parents on the importance of jointly participating in ECD programs with their children.

Challenges that poor households experienced were unemployment which led to children in poor households not accessing ECD programs even though they were available. Unemployment meant that many of the poor households did not have the resources to enable them to afford to pay transport and crèche fees. Local government needs to create employment opportunities in Maphumulo. Since poor households are unable to afford crèche fees, informal ECD programs could be the alternative. The preceding indicates a need for the creation of informal ECD programs in Maphumulo such as play groups to ensure that children who cannot afford centre based ECD programs have an alternative option so they do not lag behind their peers. This study (despite its small sample) has confirmed that ECD programs are important to children who are vulnerable and who come from poor households as they provide early learning that stimulates cognitive development and also provide opportunities for food security. The study indicated that ECD led to the development of the child through teacher-child interactions and it also resulted in parent-child interactions. These

impacted on speech, writing, reading and numeracy skills as well as general socialisation skills.

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Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

Key Informants in-depth interview schedule: Early childhood development programs

1. How many ECD programs are available in the community and where are they geographically located?
2. How many of these ECD programs are recognised by the Department of Social Development?
3. Does this have any impact on accessibility of ECD programs by parents?
4. What measures does the Department of Social Development use to determine that an ECD program is accessible to all children within the community?
5. What is the minimum and maximum number of children a Crèche can enrol and why?
6. What barriers do parents' experience in accessing ECD programs?
7. What interventions have been put in place to increase access to ECD programs by poor children?
8. Why is there a variation in accessibility to ECD programs between children living in townships and rural areas?
9. Why is there a variation in accessibility to ECD programs between children living in high and low income households?
10. What guides are provided to Crèches regarding the cost of enrolling a child in an ECD program?
11. How are ECD programs subsidised by the Department of Social Development?
12. How is the selection made of Crèches that will receive subsidisation?
13. What is the definition of ECD programs?
14. What do parents understand about ECD programs?
15. What is the role of ECD programs?
16. What are formal and informal ECD programs?
17. How do parents access informal ECD programs example play groups, toy libraries?
18. Describe what is provided by ECD programs?
19. How is the participation of parents incorporated into ECD programs?
20. Why is there a gap in parent and child participating together in ECD programs?
21. What interventions are in place to encourage parent participation?
22. How are parents and care-givers supported by early childhood development programs?

23. What are the benefits of early childhood development programs to children and parents in the community?

Participant in-depth interview schedule: Group A Parents who have enrolled their children in an ECD Program at Bekezela Creche

1. How many ECD programs are available in your community?
2. Describe where are ECD programs situated geographically in your community?
3. How does your child access Bekezela Creche example by walking or using public transport?
4. Why have u particularly chosen to enrol you child to Bekezela Creche?
5. What is the cost of enrolling your child in Bekezela Crèche?
6. What are your views on the cost of Bekezela Creche?
7. How affordable are ECD Programs in the community?
8. How accessible is Bekezela Creche to all children who live in Maphumulo?
9. Describe any barriers that parents and children experience in accessing ECD programs?
10. In your view what are the possible interventions that can be used to minimise barriers in accessing ECD programs?
11. What do you understand about ECD programs?
12. Describe what is provided by ECD programs?
13. Can you comment on any experience your child has with ECD programs?
14. In you view what is the role of ECD programs?
15. What do you understand about formal and informal ECD programs?
16. Describe how parents can participate in early childhood development programs?
17. Discuss possible reasons why parents' participation in ECD programs is poor?
18. What is the role of parents in ECD programs?
19. How are parents and care-givers supported by early childhood development programs?
20. How do children benefit from attending early childhood development programs?
21. How do parents benefit from enrolling their children in early childhood development programs?
22. What are the benefits of early childhood development programs in the community?

Participant in-depth interview schedule: Group B Parents who have not enrolled their children in any ECD Program

1. Do you know any ECD programs that are available in your community?
2. How many ECD programs are available in your community?
3. Describe where are ECD programs located geographically in your community?
4. Why have you chosen not to enrol your child in an ECD program?
5. What care arrangement do you have for your child?
6. What are your views on the cost of ECD programs?
7. How affordable are ECD Programs in your community?
8. How close are crèches to where you live in Maphumulo?
9. Describe any barriers that parents and children experience in trying to access ECD programs?
10. In your view what are the possible interventions that can be used to minimise barriers in accessing ECD programs?
11. What do you understand about ECD programs?
12. Describe what you think is provided by ECD programs?
13. Why in your view are ECD programs not easily accessible to poor children?
14. In you view what is the role of ECD programs?
15. What do you understand about formal and informal ECD programs?
16. Describe any community programs that provide early childhood development knowledge to parents?
17. Why do you think that some parents choose not to enrol their children in an ECD program?
18. What resources are available to parents for the provision of early learning of their children?
19. What kind of support is available for parents and care-givers that have not enrolled their children in an ECD program?

Focus group discussion schedule: ECD teachers and members of governing body of Bekezela Crèche

1. How many ECD programs are available in the community and where are they geographically located?
2. How accessible is Bekezela Creche to all children living in Maphumulo?
3. What is the minimum and maximum number of children Bekezela Creche can enrol and why?
4. Explain the barriers parents' experience in accessing ECD programs?
5. What interventions have been put in place to increase access to Bekezela Creche by poor children in Maphumulo?
6. What factors determine the cost of enrolling a child in Bekezela Creche?
7. How affordable are ECD programs to parents?
8. Is there an intervention that helps poor families to be able to enrol their children to Bekezela Creche?
9. As teachers, what do you understand about ECD programs?
10. What do parents understand about ECD programs?
11. What is the role of ECD programs?
12. What are your views on formal and informal ECD programs?
13. Describe what is provided by ECD programs?
14. How can parents be involved in ECD programs?
15. What is the role of parents in ECD programs?
16. How is the participation of parents in the ECD program provided in Bekezela Creche?
17. What interventions are in place at Bekezela Creche to encourage parent participation?
18. How are parents and care-givers supported by early childhood development programs?
19. What are the benefits of early childhood development programs to children and parents in the community?

Appendix 2: Consent Form

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 25 July 2016

Dear Parents

My name is Sibahle Mkhize I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College campus. I am pursuing my studies in the school of Built Environment and Development Studies. My contact details are as follows;

Cell phone: 0767554925

Email address: sibahlessmkhize@gmail.com

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research in accessing perceptions on early childhood development programs. The aim and purpose of this research is to assess the availability and accessibility of early childhood development programs, to assess parents understanding of early childhood development programs, to evaluate parents' role and participation in ECD programs and consider the benefits of ECD programs to children and parents. The study is expected to enrol a total of 26 participants, of these participants 20 will be parents who will be divided into two groups. The first group consists of 10 parents who have enrolled their children at Bekezela Crèche ECD Programme and the second group consists of 10 parents who have not enrolled their children at Bekezela Crèche. Three participants will be teachers at the Bekezela Crèche and the remaining 3 will consist of representatives from various organizations in the field of Early Childhood Development. This Research will be done in Maphumulo and focus on Early Childhood Development Program provided at Bekezela Crèche. It will involve the following procedures in-depth interviews using an interview schedule with parents and various organization representatives. One structured focus group discussion with Teachers

at Bekezela Crèche. The duration of your participation if you choose to be part of this study is expected to be one month.

The study will provide no direct benefits to the participants.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number HSS/0714/016M).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher (Cell phone: 0767554925

Email address: sibahlessmkhize@gmail.com

or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

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Participation in this research is voluntary and participants may withdraw their participation at any point in the duration of the research. In an event of refusal, withdrawal of participation, the participants will not incur penalty or loss of treatment which they are normally entitled to. Potential consequences of participants withdrawing from the research will result in the participants input being incomplete in the study. If the participants wishes to withdraw from the study the need to notify the researcher as early as possible by sending an email or cell phone message using the contact details provided or notifying the researcher verbally. The researcher will terminate the participant from the study under the following circumstances: if the participant keeps postponing scheduling a time to be interviewed more than 3 times and the participants moves into a new location outside of Maphumulo.

Should you choose to participate in this research please note that all information is kept confidential, pseudo names will be used in the study. Your personal information will only be known by the researcher and the supervisor only. The data and stored samples will be kept in a disk in a safe place only known by researcher and supervisor. Please note that the University's policy states that stored data may only be kept for a period of 5 years and afterwards the disk will be destroyed and transcripts will be shredded.

CONSENT

I _____(print name) have been informed about the study entitled

(Provide
details)_____

(Provide name of researcher)_____.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher: Cell phone: 0767554925

Email address: sibahlessmkhize@gmail.com

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

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I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion	YES / NO
Video-record my interview / focus group discussion	YES / NO
Use of my photographs for research purposes	YES / NO

Signature of